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RATTLEPATE;

OR,

THE MISSING DEED.

A LEGEND OF MANHATTAN IN COLONY TIMES.

BY SCOTT R. SHERWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "THE INCOGNITO," "TINKA, THE SORCERESS," ETC.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,
118 WILLIAM STREET.

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(No. 113.)

RATTLEPATE.

CHAPTER I.

"THE LEOPARD."

SEVERAL years preceding the Revolution of '76, there stood on the principal highway, about three miles from New York, and facing the Hudson, an inn called "The Leopard." At the period wherein the scenes of this romance are laid, the city mentioned, though then as ever the chief mart of this hemisphere, was restricted to the lower extremity of Manhattan Island. The Leopard was an unobtrusive and homely tavern, where pedestrians frequently stopped, and mounted travelers occasionally. Voyagers by coach never lodged there. The arched gateway to this obscure colonial inn was surmounted by pine boughs, the resemblance to which a few frequenters, in their bacchanalian revels, found sufficiently strong to denominate *The Chapel*. The habitation and its surroundings were by no means inviting; the dwelling, lost in a thicket of massive trees, was almost shut out from the light, and no effort appeared ever to have been made to remove or to subdue the aspect of gloom that hung about the place.

Despite this unattractive exterior, the lower hall or main room of The Leopard presented, one evening in the summer of 17—, a tableau of comfort and abundance. A north-west wind, the most intense that occurs on the east bank of the river, was blowing violently and swaying the elm and pine grove that environed the tavern. The night was dark, and the sky covered with clouds; the dust, rising from the road, was blindly dashed by impetuous gusts amid the foliage. Not imagining that any traveler would seek admission at such an hour, under such circumstances, the host had closed his door and was sumptuously feasting, at a boiled mess, with his family.

The family were seated on wooden benches, around a

greasy and uncovered table, lighted by a miserable tin lamp. It consisted, first of the innkeeper, a little squat man in a striped blouse, with great copper ear-rings and a lively, twinkling eye ; then of his better-half, a sprightly fat woman of vigorous mould, whose upper lip was covered with a thin, dark moustache, and who had a loud voice and nimble hand ; and finally of half-a-dozen sailors, dirty and wretchedly clad, working their best with their wooden spoons, and swallowing, without a grimace, pieces of meat hot enough to set on fire a northern ice palace. All were bawling, wrangling and swearing in bad Dutch and worse English, with the most satisfied air in the world.

Other tables were placed for the ordinary patrons of the tavern ; but all were at this time unoccupied, excepting one situated in the angle of the hall. By the rays from a smoking candle, which they had forgotten to snuff, a young man of genteel figure, whose costume was of a modern, if not elegant cut, was writing with great application, without appearing disturbed at his dim light. His physiognomy was expressive of profound grief, while his agile fingers made his pen fly over his paper, as if they might prove unable to give form to the feverish ideas that were revolving in his mind. His dejected attitude was in singular contrast with the noisy agitation of the prosaic and greedy household to which he was evidently a stranger. Moreover, the others seemed to be no more occupied with him than he with them ; excepting that once mine host, who was called in his proper name, Christern Gumpert, though commonly plain Chris, shrugging his shoulders, said, in Dutch, to his companions,

"Look there, Marian ; poor master Flemyngh is still writing his sweetheart, and does not dream of supper. The idea of his wasting paper like that, the blockhead ! He has made more crow's-feet within the last quarter-hour than I make during an entire year in keeping the accounts of the inn !"

"Poor boy !" responded the robust virago, casting a look of sympathy at the young man. "He is breaking his heart. You must be careful, Chris, to keep account of the pens and paper ; he has three pence worth there."

The supper was nearly over when a gust of wind struck violently against the house, and at the same instant the door

opened, and a man precipitated himself into the room. The sudden introduction of the air from without was on the point of extinguishing the lamp ; Mrs. Marian uttered an exclamation of impatience ; but, almost immediately, the new-comer, shutting the door with an effort, cried, in a joyous tone, with a foreign accent,

"To the dogs with this north-wester, which does not recognize an old acquaintance ! The pest has blinded my eyes and filled my nose with dust. Pouah ! My stomach is full of sand. Come ! my good people, be quick and let me have something to comfort me—*s'il vous plait*. The Kamsin of Africa never treated me as illy as your angry squall !"

He threw himself on a seat before a table and commenced coughing and rubbing his eyes, at the same time uttering strange exclamations, evidently made up from a dozen different languages.

Mine host and his wife, before quitting their seats to serve the unknown, who appeared so extraordinarily, scrutinized him with curiosity. He was a tall man, of forty-five years or thereabouts, with sunburnt features and thin gray locks. His dress, poor enough and old, consisted of large pantaloons, of oriental cut, a sailor's jacket fastened around his shoulders by an Indian cachemire scarf, exceedingly dirty and ragged, and a fur cap of singular shape. Under this somewhat odd accouterment, the unknown preserved a haughty bearing, a memento, perhaps, of former opulence ; but the look of joyous heedlessness spread over his countenance, denoted the boon companion little enough disposed to glory in his present or past advantages.

Dame Gumpert looked at him with a bewildered air.

"Look ! my man," said she, to her husband, in Dutch, for that was her mother-tongue. "What is that man ? Can he be a sailor ?"

"Not a sailor from these parts," replied Chris, contemptuously. "He is some sort of sea-fish."

However, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and advanced towards the traveler.

"In what way may I serve you, comrade ?" asked he, in English.

The other did not seem offended at this tone of familiarity.

"Hough! Hough! Hough!" said he, coughing, to drive the dust from his throat, "may I drink with you, *mio amigo*? Wherever I may be, I make it my practice to follow the customs of the country; I have drunk tafia in Guyenne, beer in Holland, rum in the West Indies, Sumatre-water in Africa, Madeira in Calcutta. Yet, while I think, if you still have on these shores some Rhine wine, as in the older colony days, I would willingly renew therewith our friendly relations of yore."

Mine host had not understood much of that harangue; but the word Rhine wine was sufficient. He disappeared, and speedily returned with a glass and a bottle which he slowly opened. He found the stranger occupied in watching, with a pensive air, the young man who was still writing at the other extremity of the hall. When the cork noisily quitted the mouth of the bottle, the unknown jumped and threw back his head.

"But," said he, negligently, "I am not in the habit of drinking alone! Bring another glass, sir inn-keeper; some one here, I think, will do me the honor of keeping me company."

And he fastened his eyes on Oscar Fleming; but the latter continued writing and never once raised his head.

"With all my heart! I could not refuse you!" said Gumpert, with vivacity, appearing to appropriate to himself that somewhat doubtful invitation.

He seized his glass, filled it to the brim, and smacked his lips as he held it to the light.

The guest smiled, and taking his glass in his turn, invited Gumpert, by a sign, to seat himself before him. Mine host, already more respectful, acquiesced in all his Amphitryon desired, and obeyed with an awkward air. As the stranger did not press a renewal of the conversation, and was still looking at Oscar, the master of The Leopard thought he might open the fire of his politeness.

"You are a seafaring man, mynheer?" said he, in a wheedling tone. "Yes, a sailor and merchant—a captain, perhaps? That you have navigated on the high sea, one can easily perceive."

Gumpert really thought he was paying the handsomest

compliment in the world to the unknown; the latter responded, with a distracted air,

"Indeed, if after having thrice doubled Cape Horn, and four times the Cape of Good Hope, one may call himself a sailor; if after having four times made his fortune in maritime traffic, one may call himself a merchant, I am the one and the other. It still seems only yesterday that I was named *The Nabob*. But, my dear host," continued he, in an altered voice, "let us talk of another subject. You live too near the Red House, not to know its actual proprietor?"

"The Red House," replied Gumpert, with a knowing air, "is but half a mile from here, and Mynheer Vonderspeight, the master, never passes the tavern, on his way to the city, without saying good-morning and inquiring the news."

"Very well; this Mynheer Vonderspeight is undoubtedly considered rich?"

At the moment the landlord opened his mouth to respond, his wife cried out to him, in Dutch,

"Take care, Chris, and turn your words well; he asks about a neighbor."

The personage who had given himself the surname of the Nabob, threw a look across the table at the housewife, as if, in his polyglottal researches, he had not forgotten the language then spoken.

"As to his being rich," replied Gumpert, filling anew his glass, "there is no doubt of it. Mynheer Vonderspeight, in addition to owning the Red House, is proprietor of a fur factory and doing a large business, at Albany. He has still another establishment in Philadelphia, besides one in this city; he owns, moreover, large property in real estate, some of which is improved; and, again—"

"I know, I know," interrupted the traveler, with a bitter smile; "and yet, twenty years ago, Master Vonderspeight was only a poor clerk in the employ of Captain Albert Mery. Is it not astonishing that all the effects of that family have passed into the hands of good Mynheer Vonderspeight?"

"Turn your words well, my man!" cried Marian, anew, considerably disturbed.

The stranger drew himself up, and exclaimed with the purest Dutch accent,

"Thunder! are you afraid to speak out?"

Gumpert and his partner remained stupefied.

"Good! good!" replied the husband, with a joyous tone; "I knew very well that he was one of us, and nothing more. But remember, Marian, that he has four times made his fortune. Let us drink another bottle, mynheer, to celebrate your journey hither."

The Nabob inclined his head in token of assent, and Marian hastened to serve another bottle of the same wine. Gumpert filled anew the glasses to their brims.

"I guess, mynheer," continued he, "that it is not long since you disembarked—one can see that."

"Only a few hours since I was on board the *Syren*, coming from the Indies."

"The *Syren*! A good vessel, and its captain a brave man! And you are returning to the colony, mynheer? Very good; men are always dreaming of restoring their bones to their native soil."

"I am not absolutely of that idea; for it is quite possible that I may embark on the first vessel departing for the Indies or Brazil. This will depend on how matters are settled to-night at the Red House."

The innkeeper and his wife were listening with astonishment; for a moment Oscar Flemyngh had been quite attentive. The stranger spoke with a sort of heedlessness, as if he was perfectly indifferent about taking the entire universe into confidence with his projects.

"But, *corpo di Bacco!*!" continued he, joyously, himself seizing the bottle, "you have not told me, comrade, how this old rascal, Vonderspeight, made his fortune? Your health!"

They filled and drank.

"How he made his fortune?" replied the innkeeper, who commenced to grow animated; "that is not easy to comprehend. As they have told you, Mynheer Vonderspeight was clerk in the house of Mery, and was regarded by every one a poor devil of a fellow; but, after the misfortunes of that family, he became suddenly proprietor of the estate of his former masters. Old Mery was dead; his son Frank, a desperate, dissipated dog, was obliged to leave the country to escape punishment for a villainous escapade. After his departure,

Vonderspeight showed the instruments to prove that he had purchased and paid for the Mery estate. This appeared, at first, droll ; but the instruments were in due form, and the signature perfect ; so that it ended by no one's speaking further of the affair. From that day to this, Vonderspeight has prospered ; he has added crown to crown, and having, at length, withdrawn from active occupation to the Red House, is living economically in that retreat."

The traveler listened attentively to all these details, and seemed to be revolving in his mind the facts narrated. He finally replied in an accent of perfect tranquillity,

" And the young man, that miserable dog, Frank Mery—has no one heard of him ? Has he never returned to his native country ?"

" I imagine not, mynheer, for he would have been stoned to death, at one time, if he had dared to show himself. To be short, he had betrayed a young lady of good family, and had killed in a duel the brother of the poor child. It is a story that made quite a noise at the time. The community was so indignant at him, that he was obliged to conceal himself, and it is generally supposed that he embarked in a vessel bound for Spain. However that may be, no tidings have ever been received from him, and so much the better ; he was a scamp, to say the least."

" Amen !" coolly replied the Nabob. " But to return to Vonderspeight ; he undoubtedly enjoys great consideration here, and passes for an honest man ; is it not so ? His fortune is well and prudently invested ?"

" Hem ! hem ! mynheer, I cannot say. I only know that Master Vonderspeight is a tight-fisted man, whom they accuse of sometimes lending money at usurious rates, and occasionally smuggling. They pretend also—"

" Why do you repeat such calumnies against a neighbor ?" cried Marian, contemptuously. " Go to ! you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Gumpert, to give ear to such slanders, and to repeat them to a stranger ! Let me say that old Vonderspeight is the cream of good people, and has a heart of gold ; but as he shows himself very little, and rarely appears of an evening outside of his home at the Red House, the neighbors tell some strange stories of his habits. Would you

believe it? they are afraid, the cowards, to pass his house after nightfall. I would I might find a bag of gold on going to the Red House; they would see, then, that I was not afraid."

"Ha, ha! grandame, you appear to me equal to seeking a bag of crowns at the dragon's mouth! So, then, *carissima*, master Vonderspeight lives alone in the old house?"

"By no means, mynheer," replied the landlady, who, having cut her husband short, in the fear of his being over-communicative, felt disposed to indulge a little gossip on her own account. "For some time Mynheer Vonderspeight has been worried at his solitude; he has lately received into his house, therefore, the widow and daughter of an old revenue-officer of his former acquaintance, two excellent ladies, who, before his assistance, were living in wretched circumstances. It was very kind of him."

"Bah!" murmured the husband; "he has good reasons for that."

"Keep quiet!" rejoined Marian. "Why are you so scandalous? Our neighbor is a wise man, and has never had any idea of making the girl pay for his kindness. As for myself, I do not see any evil in Miss Adele's marrying her benefactor, one of these fine mornings."

"He will not marry her!" cried Oscar Flemyngh, impetuously, who had not lost a word of this conversation. "Adele Marston is too beautiful, too pure to become the prey of so great a scamp. No! he will never marry her!"

And he fell on his seat, bowing his face in his hands.

The virago shrugged her shoulders.

"I had forgotten him," said she, in a demi-tone, designating Oscar. "The poor young man is cracked in the brain after Miss Adele. They were formerly acquainted at ——, where they both lived in their youth; they are very anxious to marry, but the boy is not well enough off, being only a poor attorney. The widow Marston is a proud woman and fond of display, and hence opposed to the marriage. She prefers the offer of Mynheer Vonderspeight, who proposes to charge them—herself and her daughter—with the care of managing her household affairs; these ladies are now with him, and are very fortunate. Finally, the report has spread

that Vonderspeight intends marrying the young lady; then the young man, whom they call Oscar Flemyngh, came to lodge here. For eight days he has been constantly hovering about the Red House, to catch a glimpse of Miss Adele; but they will not admit him. He passes his time in writing letters, which never reach their address; still he is not disengaged.

"Poor boy!" said the stranger, with a thoughtful air. "That is just as I would myself have done, not long since. Bah! Thanks for your information concerning Mynheer Vonderspeight and the Red House," continued he, finishing his glass and rising. "Decidedly, neither appears to enjoy a reputation above reproach. Well! I shall soon have an opportunity to judge for myself; I am going to steer for the Red House, and this very night Vonderspeight and I shall meet again."

"You are going to the Red House, at this late hour?" cried the innkeeper, with a singular accent.

"Why not? Is there any danger in that?"

"My husband would say," replied Marian, "that you will be lost in the darkness."

"I know the way."

"And then," continued the landlord, embarrassed, "they will refuse to admit you at Vonderspeight's, at such an hour. The door is carefully closed at nightfall, after which it is opened for no one."

"It will open for me," said the unknown, with assurance. "Well, my good friends, *salaam alicum*, that is to say *god nicht*, or more briefly *adieu*."

After this cosmopolitan salute, he directed his steps resolutely towards the door. Mine host and his wife looked at him with an astonished air; Gumpert threw himself, at length, in his path.

"Well! And your bill?" cried he, in a thundering voice. The Nabob turned.

"You are just," said he, smiling. "I come from a land where the fatigued traveler, entering the first house on his road, is served with the best, and without being subjected to any formality; but in this savage hemisphere, to day, as of yore, it is not the same."

He fumbled a long time in his pockets, and found at length a microscopic piece of silver, which he threw upon the table.

"That is all I have left," said he, carelessly.

"All you have left!" exclaimed Gumpert, furiously. "But this will not pay for my wine—my Rhine wine! The best of my cave!"

"You have drunk the best half," replied the unknown, without loosing his imperturbable coolness. "Let us be quits."

"But did you not invite me? How? A man who has made four times his fortune can not pay his score? A nabob from India!"

"Come, now, my dear; when I told you I had made four times my fortune, it was easy for you to understand that I have lost three times, at least. You might have guessed as much from my outfit."

Mine host and his wife seemed indisposed to be satisfied with the explanations given by this singular personage with a tone of such indifference and raillery. They might be said to have almost swallowed up the inn with the threats and imprecautions that followed. They could not seize the stranger's baggage, for that consisted simply of an old ratan stick, good for nothing but to chase the dogs. The object of attack listened, with a smile on his lips, to the abuse with which he was overwhelmed.

We can not predict how the quarrel might have ended, when Oscar advanced timidly between the contending parties.

"Sir," said he, modestly, to the traveler, "will you permit me to render, without your knowing it, a slight service? If you are willing, Gumpert may charge to my personal account the balance of your bill."

Mine host and his wife were promptly appeased, though not without shrugging their shoulders. The unknown scrutinized the artless youth who had thus interfered and extricated him from his embarrasment; but he did not respond.

"One might conceive," resumed Oscar, seeking to excuse his good act, "that a traveler landing perhaps hurriedly, had forgotten his purse with his baggage."

"I have neither purse, nor baggage, nor hearth, nor home," interrupted the stranger, quickly. "I scatter gold when I have it, and I often forget, as to-day for example,

that I have not any. Well, young man, I accept your offer; your features please me, as they did at first. You bear an astonishing resemblance to—. At all events, I accept. Perhaps your money, thrown away upon a poor devil like me, will not be altogether lost for you; perhaps, again—. But I dream. Thanks, then, and good-by. God is great!"

At the same time, this mysterious visitor opened the door, and drawing his fur cap over his eyes, disappeared into the darkness.

Oscar at first appeared disconcerted at his sudden departure; but after a moment's reflection, he briefly announced to his host and his wife that he would not perhaps reenter during the night, and hastened to rejoin the stranger.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPOSAL.

ON quitting the enclosure of The Leopard, the traveler followed the dusty road that wound up the heights of the river's bank. He advanced with a rapid step, as if he were impatient to escape the neighborhood of the inhospitable dwelling he had just left; and, indeed, despite his apparent indifference, he had vividly felt the shame of his recent humiliation. But soon, yielding to new impulses, he slackened his step, and, either to determine which road to follow, or to recall former scenes in familiar localities, suddenly paused and remained for a moment in contemplation.

The wind, though somewhat changed and abated, was still blowing with violence; but the clouds, borne on by the furious breeze, had left the sky clear and resplendent with stars. The moon was rising full and red above the horizon. By its light, the traveler could take in, with a glance, an immense space. Beyond him reposed the scattered country-seats along the Hudson, with the picturesque banks of that stream, its somber pine groves and lofty elms laden with heavy foliage, its old rocks rising from the thin soil covered with their

verdure of moss and thyme. In the distance, upon the waters, the reflection of the light from the city itself showed with phosphorescent gleams. Below the city extended the bay in its superb majesty. Its waves, ordinarily so calm after night-fall, agitated now by the impetuous winds, were bounding in scum toward the beach. At times, when a gust would whirl the dust from the road, this magnificent panorama would suddenly disappear, and afterward, the squall having passed, the somber beach, the starry heavens and the struggling sea would appear anew in their grave and imposing splendor.

The features of the unknown had assumed a melancholy expression ; a tear even trembled in his eye ; he was forgetting to pursue his way, when the noise of approaching footsteps startled him from his meditation. He turned slowly to resume his march, following the highway, which he still pursued, when Oscar Flemyngh suddenly appeared before him, bowing with timidity.

"Ah ! this is you, young man ?" said he, at length, in his dry, sarcastic tone. "I did not hope to see you so soon. Egad ! Do you already repent your good action ? Have you reflected, perchance, that my old fur cap or my sailor's jacket might be preferable to the acquaintance of an adventurer."

His roughness intimidated still further poor Oscar.

"Sir," stammered he, with a supplicating tone, "spare me these reflections ; I do not merit them. I detected under your modest costume a man of good birth, who has seen better days ; the discovery determined me to solicit from you a favor of inestimable price to me."

"A favor ?" repeated the Nabob, ironically. "You have done me a very slight service to demand so quickly a return ! Listen, comrade ; in the course of my life I have given thousands of rupees to men whom I have known, and whom I esteemed still less than you know or esteem me, without looking to them for even an acknowledgment. But, explain yourself ! I am, my faith ! curious to know in what respect I can be useful to any one in your circumstances. But the evening is advanced ! I am already delayed, and my time is precious.

"Well ! let us march on," said Oscar, vivaciously. "We will talk on our way."

They resumed their route, and advanced side by side for a moment. Oscar seemed quite embarrassed as to how he would open so difficult a negotiation.

"Sir," continued he, at length, with emotion, "did you not say, there below, to the innkeeper, that you were going to the Red House—to Mr. Vonderspeight's?"

"I said so."

"I heard you observe, moreover, if I am not mistaken, that you were personally known to Mr. Vonderspeight, and that you might possess over him some influence."

"Hem! that might not be impossible. If Vonderspeight is what he ought to be, my influence will unquestionably be great in his house. But, my friend, why these questions?"

"It is, therefore, sir," said Oscar, with warmth, "that I implore your protection for one a thousand times worthy of your interest—for a poor girl, whose sufferings have become intolerable."

"So! So! I begin to see which way the wind blows. You would speak of the young lady whom Vonderspeight has received at the Red House, with her mother? In fine, they spoke to me of a little flirtation between you, I think?"

"A flirtation, sir?" repeated Oscar, indignant. "Say a powerful, irresistible love, which will end only with my life!"

"Bah! It is the same story with the young, all the world over!" said the nabob, with a railing tone; "yet, like the rest, I have passed through all that; I still remember—but why talk of this? Boy, your love seems to me of too recent date to be so profound and tenacious!"

"Alas! It commenced in our tenderest infancy! I loved Adele Marston long before knowing it myself. Her family and mine dwelt in the same town; we lived as neighbors there. Her father was in the revenue service; mine was a subordinate custom-house officer; their pursuits often threw them together. As far back as I can go in memory, I see the graceful and smiling figure of Adele. I was unfortunate with my parents; despite my efforts to please my mother, I inspired her with an unconquerable estrangement; often, in looking at me, she would weep, and then would repel me with horror. My father held me in brutal aversion; he frequently ill-treated me, on the most frivolous pretext. He

was gentle and full of tendernesss for his other two children, whilst I, the hated one, received from him only rebuffs and blows. It was ordinarily with Adele that I took refuge after these humiliating scenes. She pitied me, encouraged me, and always ended with consoling me. More than once, child as she was, she would undertake to defend me from my father when he maltreated me in her presence ; she would supplicate him, with joined hands, to spare me, casting herself between me and the destined blow. One day, in interceding, she fell senseless and defaced at my feet in attempting to save me from the fury of my father. Poor child ! I see her now, lying pale and inanimate, with her dark, disheveled locks ! But when these slight storms were appeased, how happy the moments I passed with my young companion in the sweet freedom of childhood ! Often, holding her by the hand, I would wander along the sea-coast, gathering shells ; we would advance out upon the sandy beach till the silvery crest from the highest waves would approach and caress our naked feet ; at other times we would chase the butterflies in the open field, or—but I undoubtedly fatigue you,” interrupted Oscar, uneasily. “ What matter to you these childish details ?”

The traveler seized the young man’s hand, and shook it vigorously.

“ Proceed, proceed,” said he, in an altered voice. “ In listening to you, I feel rejuvenated ; my heart beats like the wing of a sea-mew. Continue, *cospetto* ! It is sometimes permitted the ass to listen to the song of the nightingale, although he may not imitate it.”

Oscar did not remark these words, where emotion was concealed under a gross form. He replied, in a melancholy tone,

“ As I advanced in years, I was compelled, however, to abandon seeing Adele so frequently. Misfortune had gifted me with precocity. It was only by application and labor, I felt it well, that I could become worthy of her. I acquired my education almost unassisted, and, on attaining the age of freedom, I left the paternal roof to study with an attorney. My apprenticeship was rude ; yet I have risen to the modest position I now occupy. Anon, my mother died ; I mourned her sincerely. She had never testified for me any very

marked affection ; but she had always been indulgent with me. That event broke the last tie that attached me to my father. After the death of my mother, unable longer to master his hatred, he refused to see me. I remained, therefore, like one abandoned, in my native-place, repulsed by my family, and without friends.

" A single house opened its doors to me ; this was the house of Mr. Marston. The pleasure of occasionally seeing Adele consoled me for all my misfortunes. The timid and artless child had become a young lady, and her beauty had already commenced to create notice in the world. You will see her soon, and judge for yourself if she was worthy the affection with which she inspired me. As for me, I love her to adoration, to madness. Adele did not conceal that she returned my love. My heart was full of hope. Mr. Marston beheld undisturbed our mutual affection. Mrs. Marston, however, seemed to disapprove my visits. Proud of her daughter, she had conceived ambitious projects for Adele ; moreover, she never attempted to conceal the estrangement that existed between us.

" Mr. Marston died about a year ago ; his manner of living did not allow him to leave any thing to his family. His widow and daughter, therefore, found themselves in a state bordering on poverty. I presented myself, then, with all the reserve demanded under the circumstances, to aid with my protection the two ladies. My advances were not repulsed as sharply as I had expected on the part of Mrs. Marston. Her haughty and opinionative disposition seemed to be broken by misfortune ; her ambitious ideas had fled before the imperious necessities of the hour. Adele and I no longer anticipated any very serious obstacles to our marriage.

" Affairs were in this condition, when business called Vonderspeight to ——. He had been acquainted with Mr. Marston, and quite naturally paid a visit to his widow. Adele's beauty struck him ; the sad lot of the two ladies appeared to touch his heart. I know not what means he employed, but he convinced them of his profound sympathy for them, and ended by proposing that they should accept an asylum in his house, while awaiting better days. He passed for an immensely rich man. Perhaps, ambition for a moment subdued

Mrs. Marston's caution, and aroused new hopes in her bosom. Without being influenced by certain reports not very flattering to Vonderspeight, she accepted his offers for herself and her daughter. The age and character of protector seemed to silence calumny, and it was soon arranged that the two ladies should go and establish themselves at the Red House.

" You can easily imagine my despair on learning that fact. I had only known Vonderspeight by sight; but the detestable reputation of the man, and his hypocritical physiognomy, had, at the outset, rendered him odious to me. I vainly sought to open the eyes of Mrs. Marston; she heeded me not, and treated as unjust the reports I brought her concerning her new friend; she even accused me of being influenced by jealousy and hatred. Convinced that I could obtain no encouragement from Mrs. Marston, whose views, I must acknowledge, were narrow and contracted, I addressed myself to Adele. I spoke to her with earnestness; she listened and wept, but could not resist the wishes of her mother. Again, we were very young, and I was not yet fairly embarked in my career. Where could I find a suitable asylum for her while waiting until I might be in condition to offer her an honorable and sure position? Yet she assured me that our projects would ultimately be realized; and that they were only adjourned. After I should have attained a certain position, which Mrs. Marston had established as a condition of our marriage, I was going to reclaim my betrothed. Adele promised to preserve her affection for me, and solemnly swore she would reject any one but me; half-assured by all these pledges, I left her with her mother.

" Three months have rolled by since that time; I was constantly dreaming of the hour when I should obtain by my labor and application the position on which our reunion was conditional, when I received, a few days since, a letter from Adele, which has filled me with sadness and alarm. She informs me that she is a prey to persecutions of the most odious description. Her mother has at length taken part against her. She would make her marry her would-be protector, and her resistance exposes her to the unkindest treatment. She is like a prisoner at the Red House. Her letter written in cypher, reached me only by means of a ruse. They watch

Adele with extreme vigilance. The poor child entreats me to come to her aid ; but she recommends me to observe the greatest prudence, ‘For,’ said she, ‘I do not know what those who hold me in their power may be capable of.’ She ended by assuring me that she would die before betraying her engagement with me.

“ Immediately after receiving that letter, I asked and obtained a leave of absence ; and hastening hither, I have established my quarters at the inn of The Leopard. I could not approach nearer the Red House without awaking the suspicions of Vonderspeight. For three days I hovered incessantly about the house. Vainly have I sought to communicate with Adele. From a high rock, which overlooks the house of Vonderspeight, I have several times perceived her walking in the garden ; but she was always accompanied, either by her mother who hates me, or by this odious old man who besets her ; she appeared to me very sad, very unhappy. The sight of her has augmented my desire to relieve my betrothed from her insupportable constraint. But, as I have told you, I have no means of communicating with her, and it is to find it that I have taken the liberty of addressing myself to you.”

Oscar Flemyngh was silent, awaiting with anxiety the response of the stranger. The latter took several steps in the obscurity without saying any thing.

“ Egad ! my boy,” replied he, at length, in a railing voice, “you have told a strange story ! *Allah Kerim !* Old Manhattan has changed devilishly in my absence, if young women can now be detained prisoners by an old tutor, whether he calls himself Vonderspeight or Bartolo. Come, my boy, if things have reached that pass, could not the captive lady easily address herself to the authorities ? *Veramente !* It would seem that the police and magistrates are not particularly watchful of the interests of the citizen.”

“ You did not understand me, sir ; the constraint that Adele experiences is a moral constraint. What can a friendless young woman do in her horrible situation ? Fly with her mother ? Mrs. Marston would never consent to that ; now, Adele loves me, I believe ; but when it becomes a question of leaving her mother—”

"Then why did she call you? Why has she obliged you to leave other pursuits to come here, where your presence can be of no use? Lovers have strange ideas! In your place, young man, do you know what I would do? I would seek Vonderspeight and ask him for a frank and precise explanation, in the presence of these ladies."

"I would not obtain it, and Vonderspeight, taking alarm at my sight, would redouble his rigor toward the unfortunate child. Sir, the truth must be avowed: a few words in Adele's letter made me fear they intended to exercise violence with her."

"What, then! Is her mother not there?"

"I have already told you that Mrs. Marston is a woman of narrow views, and stubborn in her blind prejudices—and this Vonderspeight is so cunning, so deceitful!"

"Hem! young man, I fear you have too bad an opinion of poor Vonderspeight."

"It can never be more severe than that of the people of the neighborhood," replied Oscar, lowering his voice. "Below there, at the inn, they did not dare to tell you the truth, Vonderspeight inspires so much fear; my presence here would no longer be a secret to him, if the greedy landlord did not consider my sojourn of some profit to his house. Every one shudders at the mention of Vonderspeight."

"The devil! And on what is founded his beautiful reputation?"

"On vague reports, I acknowledge, but which certainly have their origin in reality. In the first place, they have never explained how he so suddenly acquired the Mery estate; he has even been accused of having defrauded, by force or ruse, the last representative of that family, Frank Mery, who disappeared a long time since. Later, he is suspected of having increased his fortune by contraband and usurious practices. It is certain that this neighborhood is filled with poor farmers, whose ruin is his work; and, as to his contraband calling, his home at the Red House, they say, is the depot of smugglers, his associates. Men of doubtful aspect are seen frequently prowling about his dwelling; teams are occasionally met, loaded with bales, directing their course toward his place; even I can say that no later than last night I saw near

his house something of a nature to confirm these suspicions. At length, Vonderspeight, despite his age, passes for a man of questionable morals. Sir, I have repeated to you only the feeblest portion of the reports to which the actions of Vonderspeight have given currency; and in contemplating the nature of the rumors in circulation, imagine the grief I experience in realizing that beautiful and pure Adele is in the power of such a man!"

These revelations appeared to produce a vivid impression on the traveler.

"As time changes, so change men!" murmured he, with a broken voice. "He whom I have seen so poor, so humble, so cringing! But he must fear and tremble now! The struggle will be severe. Never mind!"

And he smiled with a defiant air.

During this conversation, the travelers had ascended the heights which overlooked the river. The wind was still blowing, but the stars of night were spreading their silvery rays over the surrounding country. Oscar and his companion had reached a path, whence a lateral road branched off to the highway; this road seemed to direct itself toward the river, through a ravine thickly wooded, and inclosed between two chains of rock. The unknown paused brusquely at the point of intersection of the roads.

"We must separate here," said he, drily. "We are not far from the Red House, and I wish no one to observe my actions. Well, young man, in two words, what do you wish of me? I acknowledge to you that I have quite enough of my own affairs to occupy me; still, if you ask nothing unreasonable—"

"Oh, I ask very little," said Oscar, his heart palpitating with joy and hope; "only consent to hand this secretly to Miss Adele."

And he presented to him the letter he had prepared at the inn.

"But how will that serve you?" asked the Nabob.

"To instruct Miss Marston of my arrival here, and to pray that she will keep up an active correspondence with me."

"And, in short, to take some imprudent step, which would derange still worse your affairs. That letter is useless, young

man ; you can do nothing for your friend so long as circumstances do not change. Conclude, rather, to wait with patience. Listen : my arrival at the Red House will work singularly with Vonderspeight, and probably he will have no opportunity to think of any thing beside. Your Adele will thus have a few days of respite ; rely on me for the rest. You have narrated your sorrows ; you have moved me more than I thought myself capable of being moved by the misfortunes of others and myself. Leave me now to serve you in my own manner. I will not conceal it from you, the moment is critical. Perhaps to-morrow I may be at the summit of the ladder of fortune ; perhaps I may be as miserable as to-day, and without hope. You shall follow my fortune ; successful, I will protect you ; unfortunate, you will never see me again, and will be forced to take your own part. While waiting, ask of me no promise that it would perhaps be impossible for me to keep ; I require freedom of action. Adieu, then ! I hope, for your sake, as well as for my own, that we shall soon meet again."

At the same time, this mysterious stranger advanced to take the road to the interior.

"At least," cried Oscar, in a suppliant tone, "promise me to tell Adele—"

An ejaculation, in a foreign tongue, was the only response he obtained ; the traveler disappeared, and the sound of his footsteps died away in the distance.

Oscar remained in the same place, disturbed and agitated.

"What can I do ?" said he to himself. "I must wait, indeed, the promises of a stranger ! Must I, on the faith of such promises, abandon Adele to her misfortunes ? Who is that man ? Whence comes he ? Despite his rough manner, there is something about him that attracts me. But have I not done wrong in opening to him my heart ? If he should prove a friend of Vonderspeight's ! If he should betray me !"

He rested himself on the grass by the roadside, and reflected for a long time.

"No," resumed he, at length, "I am satisfied that the interest he has testified toward me is sincere. Yet I applaud myself for not having revealed my project, as I for a moment intended. Well ! why not accomplish that project this very

night? The arrival of this traveler will occupy Vonderspeight and his servants; I may be able to warn Adele. Yes, yes, I must go. I shall not find another occasion so favorable."

He immediately arose and ran toward the Red House, but in an oblique direction, across the fields as if he feared he might again encounter the unknown.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE RED HOUSE.

THE Red House rose at the extremity of that deep and shaded valley or ravine, of which we have spoken. This was a grand old structure, of oblong form, with two main buildings, dating at different epochs, but equally dilapidated. It was constructed entirely of bricks, whence came its name. Altogether, it was a sad, unpleasant abode, whose aspect wore, especially at night, a sinister character. It fronted a rough road, from which it was separated by a court-yard, quite in keeping, and an iron fence. Behind it extended a garden, surrounded by high walls, and overlooked by peaked rocks.

The principal inhabitants of the Red House were together in a parlor on the ground-floor, overlooking the garden. The parlor had but little furniture, and that was old and moth-eaten; a few smoky portraits, suspended about the walls, were grimacing in their dark, wooden frames; the only ornaments were six china vases surmounted by as many oranges, stretched along the mantel-piece. A copper lamp, whose rusty reflector spread a dull light around it and left the rest of the apartment in almost complete obscurity, hung suspended from the ceiling; the wind from without, piercing the crevices about the ill-jointed windows, at moments made the flame vacillate and threatened to extinguish it.

At the extremity of a table, above which the lamp was elevated, sat "Mynheer" Vonderspeight, the proprietor of the Red House, examining with care a voluminous register; at

the other end, Mrs. Marston and her daughter were working at their woman's work. They were at the same time conversing in an undertone; or rather, Mrs. Marston was speaking with volubility, while Adele, with her eyes lowered, was answering only in monosyllables; but this monotonous chattering was too feeble to disturb the master of the house in his labor, and was frequently drowned in the wind that whistled around the building.

Vonderspeight, despite the aversion he generally inspired, did not present, at first sight, a mean and repulsive aspect. He was a man of sixty years, stout enough, and of slow and measured manners; his features, partly concealed by silver glasses without branches, and marked with deep furrows, were vulgar without being contemptible. One might guess that, during the early part of his life, Vonderspeight had been clerk in a commercial house; he still preserved, at the time of which we are speaking, the exterior of his old profession. His dress of coarse cloth was carefully brushed; false sleeves, attached above the elbows, protected that portion of his apparel against ordinary friction, whilst a white wig, well curled, adorned his bald head. At a calculated distance from his hand was placed on the table a horn snuff-box, into which he dipped at regular intervals. To be brief, from his exterior and from his carriage, he might have been taken for an eccentric gentleman, anxious for his well-being and profoundly selfish, although honest at heart, but not for a money-lender, a smuggler, or an immoral man, according to the gossip of the neighborhood.

Yet a second examination would have resulted less favorably, those clerical habits by their very affectation inspiring doubt. His smile was sweet and hypocritical; his eyes, which from time to time, turned furtively toward the ladies, had a diabolical gleam. His movements were rough and abrupt when he was not observed. His continual vigilance over himself could alone put a bridle on his natural impetuosity. His entire person had an air of treachery and affectation which could not have interested in his favor an attentive observer.

The two ladies, his guests, merit also particular mention. The mother, Mrs. Marston, was a talkative woman of

pretentious and strained manners. Her depressed forehead, her rigid features, her thin lips, her sharp voice, announced narrow-mindedness, dislike of contradiction, and stubbornness. She was dressed in ridiculous taste; a great shawl fell over her spare shoulders; she paraded many ornaments, the last relics of past opulence. Her cap, adorned with ribbons of bright colors, was of exaggerated dimensions. A young, gentle affectionate daughter could alone seek the company of such a woman and be pleased with her.

Adele Marston, on the other hand, was full of grace, simplicity and candor; it would be impossible to find a countenance at the same time nobler and more charming. Her dark eyes, her arched eyebrows, her fresh though somewhat pale cheeks, and her pretty and innocent mouth formed a ravishing combination. Notwithstanding her sadness, her costume—part rustic, part metropolitan—was modest and tasteful. She wore a short dress, in fashion at the epoch of which we write, and which was admirably adapted to her splendid figure. Her round and exquisitely-moulded arms lay across the white embroidery resting in her little black apron. Her hair, parted over her forehead, fell in bands over her shoulders, imparting to her physiognomy a virginal expression.

She was listening to her mother with apparent resignation; but from time to time she furtively passed her hand over her eyes to wipe away the tears that trembled, like the dew upon the rose-leaf, on her long, dark lashes.

At last Vonderspeight closed his register, deposited his glasses on the table, and leaning back in his wooden arm-chair, for a long time contemplated the young girl in silence; then, methodically insinuating his thumb and forefinger into his snuff-box he said, in a mellow voice,

"Well, my good Mrs. Marston, you are still occupied in trying to mold the heart and disposition of your daughter; you are a good mother and our Adele should be very grateful for the excellent counsels with which your tenderness for her inspires you. I hope that she is reasonable, and that she will attend your instructions."

No actor could imitate the insinuating accent, the smile full of sweetness, and the patriarchal gesture of Vonderspeight, as he pronounced these words; a good father could not better

have advised a cherished daughter, save that his eyelids closed with a sinister expression, which might have betrayed the insincerity of his speech.

"Yes, yes, indeed," replied Mrs. Marston, with volubility. "Do you know, my friend," (this was the title Vonderspeight exacted from the mother and daughter when they spoke to him,) "do you know that Adele will soon have reached her nineteenth year? That is the age, if any, when one should be rational. She is no longer a child; she can appreciate positions and characters, understand kindness and recognize real affection."

"She is so young!" replied the old man, in the same indulgent and paternal tone. "Many things must be pardoned to the frivolity of youth! Is it not so, my child?" continued he, addressing himself to Miss Marston. "Should you not always, by your obedience and gentleness, show yourself worthy of the care that is taken of you?"

"I hope so, sir," replied Adele, in a choked voice, without knowing what she was saying.

"Charming child!" cried Vonderspeight, vivaciously.

Then, immediately recovering himself, he added, in his blandest voice,

"Why not call me your friend, my child? Why, despite my instances, this title of *sir*, so formal and so cold? Come! Come and kiss me, my child; come and make peace—quick."

He leaned his head over the arm of his chair, and waited with joined hands and half-closed eyes. Adele remained motionless; her mother pushed her rudely, across the table.

"She will indeed, my friend—she will, indeed. It is growing late, and I believe the poor child is getting sleepy. Come Adele; go and say good-night to our good protector!"

The young lady rose and hurried to obey. At the moment she was putting her pretty lips to that yellow and furrowed forehead, she was frightened at the expression of those eyes. She shuddered; but after a moment's hesitation, she placed her lips lightly to the face of the old man and was about to retreat from the apartment, when a firm hand detained her.

"Adorable creature!" cried Vonderspeight, earnestly, "what would not one do to be loved by you!"

Adele, perceiving the impossibility of escaping, turned her head; but she could not conceal a great tear which fell on her apron.

"Ah! ah! Still in tears!" exclaimed the old man, impatiently.

At the same time, imprisoning Adele's two hands within his own, he drew her toward him with an air of benevolence.

"What! my child," said he, with unction, "should you not be truly happy in this house near your mother and me? What is wanting to you? Are you tired of the solitude in which we live? I will summon merry and pleasant company hither; I am rich; our proudest neighbors will hasten to come here at the first invitation. For you, I will overcome all my tastes and change my habits. Do you wish beautiful dresses and new ornaments? Speak, speak; express, at least, a wish, a desire, a whim, and you will see how prompt I will be to satisfy it!"

"I desire nothing, sir," murmured Adele, sobbing.

"Can you not respond to offers so noble, so generous?" cried Mrs. Marston, exasperated. "Foolish girl, will you persist in showing yourself thus ungrateful toward a benefactor, our good angel?"

"Peace! Peace! my good friend," interrupted Vonderspeight, with affected moderation. "Do not speak of that; neither she nor you owe me any thing. The satisfaction of my conscience is the only recompense I seek in doing good."

The poor girl at length succeeded in disengaging herself; she said, restraining her tears, with an effort,

"Mr. Vonderspeight, and you, mother, do not accuse me of ingratitude. I have already expressed to you my sentiments; I would be full of gratitude to a benefactor, to a friend; but I can not, I must not accept any other title."

"And why not, my child?" replied Vonderspeight, with a pious air, and raising his eyes towards heaven, "God is witness to the purity of my intentions; in soliciting another title than that of friend, I have only in view your happiness and your repose. I am old; the cares and anxieties of existence have exhausted me. I would, before dying, assure you, as

well as your mother, a fortune acquired at the price of unremitting toil. This project can receive no ill interpretation from the world. In dying, I should have the consolation of thinking that your future would be calm and prosperous."

He wiped his eyes and concealed his face in the shade, to make believe that he was weeping. Mrs. Marston became red with anger at beholding these hypocritical demonstrations. She excitedly rose.

"There is not in the world so kind a soul!" cried she. "His words are pearls. My friend, when you die, that your destiny is heaven, you may be sure; for you are a saint. Well! silly jade," continued she, shaking her finger in her daughter's face, "you alone, then, will remain insensible to so many virtues? So you have no heart? Then you are not my daughter? You make me and yourself wretched!"

"Mother," replied poor Adele, eagerly, "I wish to obey you; but you know well that a sacred engagement, contracted in my childhood—"

"Ay, with a miserable scribbler, who is barely able to take care of himself."

"Mother, I love him."

And the miserable girl burst anew into a flood of tears.

"That marriage will never take place so long as I exist!" cried Mrs. Marston, in the hight of her rage. "I would prefer to close your eyes with my own hands."

"Nay, nay, calm yourself, my dear Mrs. Marston," said Vonderspeight, slowly taking a pinch of snuff. "Your daughter is not yet of age; between this and her majority nothing can tear her from your maternal authority. I know well," added he, weighing these words and casting an oblique look at Adele, "that Miss Marston, breaking through our mutual watchfulness, has put in the post, by a little boy, Jerry's nephew, a letter to the address of a certain Mr. Oscar Flemyngh. I know, moreover, that this Mr. Oscar, immediately after receiving that letter, came to take lodgings there below, at Gumpert's, and that, for several days, he has been hovering about the Red House; but—"

"He is here!" cried the young woman, with transport. "Oh! thanks! thanks! he has not forgotten me!"

Vonderspeight bit his lips on perceiving the imprudence he had committed.

"Do not thank God for that!" said he, with a treacherous smile. "Your lover may find it more difficult than he imagines to dupe a mother and a protector. A sound thrashing or a blow on the head can soon end *his* enterprise; and Mrs. Marston, I trust, will not be deceived by the ruses of a little girl?"

"Me? I would sooner lock her up in a closet without air or light, than let her exchange a word with this young intriguer! I promise you, my friend, that my watchfulness shall not abate."

"I, on my side, will watch," replied the old man, with a threatening tone. "And Jerry, with his gun, will also watch. Come! Mild means have failed against Adele's obstinacy; we must now try others."

"I will assist you! I will assist you!" repeated Mrs. Marston, impressively. "As to this Oscar Flemyngh, I detest him more than you can."

Adele covered her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Poor as I am," murmured she, "who will protect me?"

At this moment, the solemn and mournful sound of a cracked bell resounded in the court-yard, amid the clamor of the wind. Vonderspeight made a movement of surprise.

"Who can come at such an hour?" said he, somewhat disturbed. "No one can enter my house after sunset; every one about here knows my habits. It may be—"

He did not achieve his thought, and a cold sweat stood on his countenance. A new ring of the bell resounded, louder and more prolonged than the first.

"Ay, ay, it must be," replied he, agitatedly. "Only visitors of a certain description could announce themselves thus. My dear friend," continued he, addressing himself to Mrs. Marston, stupefied, "entertain them for a moment while I go and put my books in a place of safety; say that I shall return instantly."

He lifted under his arms the enormous registers with which the table was covered, and prepared to go out with his load, when the door opened; Jerry, the only servant of the house, (we do not count a poor woman of the neighborhood, who

came in the morning to do the housework, and withdrew at nightfall,) appeared on the door-sill. He was a rough laboring man, almost idiotic in expression, tall and slender as a reed, with thin and bristling hair, and the features of a brute; his buckskin dress, his cowhide boots and iron buckles, announced rather a farm-servant than a footman.

"Well, Jerry," inquired Vonderspeight, hurriedly, in German, his mother-tongue, "who is it?"

"A gentleman, who wishes to be admitted," replied the domestic, in a foolish tone.

"Does he look like a custom-house officer or a—"

"He looks like nothing at all. I would have driven him away; but he answered that he knew you well, and told his name."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know whether he was fooling me or not. He said he was called Mr. Rattlepate."

This burlesque name appeared to produce on Vonderspeight the same effect as the magic name of *Boudocani* on the officials of Bagdad. He turned pale and let fall the heavy registers he held under his arms; then he rushed upon the servant, seized him by the collar, and cried out, in a stifled voice,

"Knave! Wretch! My enemies have paid you to pronounce this name in my presence! I know not what prevents my breaking your stupid head! He of whom you speak is dead; do you hear? He died fifteen years ago, ay, twenty, and he will not return again; he will never return!"

The old man, in his fury, evinced a superhuman vigor; Jerry could hardly disengage himself from his hands.

"He is dead!" replied the latter, with a bewildered air.
"And yet he speaks!"

Here came a new ring at the bell, bearing witness to the impatience of the visitor.

"I am going to throw a pail of water on his head," said Jerry, moving as if to escape; "they say that will drive away ghosts."

Vonderspeight detained him by the arm.

"Wait! Wait! My God!" responded he, eagerly. "If this should be him! That report of his death has never

been certain ; and one can escape a shipwreck. Yes, yes ; it must be him. I am lost !"

And he fell, almost swooning, on a seat.

" It is he, and it is not he !" grumbled Jerry. " Come ; must I go and open the door to this ghost, or ask whence he comes ?"

" Let him in ! Let him in !" cried the old man, in a broken voice. " He has a right to enter here ; this delay will only irritate him ! Yes ; let him enter—holy virgin ! How ward off this new blow ?"

And, while the servant moved away, shaking his head, he remained absorbed in reflection. He had completely forgotten the ladies. The mother and the daughter, surprised and frightened at that unexpected scene, had withdrawn into an obscure corner of the parlor, without uttering a word.

As soon as the shutting of the door and a sound of steps announced the stranger's approach, Vonderspeight drew himself up, with an effort.

" Come," said he, as if to himself ; " there may still be some hope. Courage ! Courage ! I will resist until death !"

A loud and joyous voice made itself heard in the corridor.

" Leave ! Out of my way ! I dwelt in the house before you !" it cried. " The oldest swallow always known its nest !"

" No doubt !—it is he !" murmured Vonderspeight.

At the same instant appeared in the doorway the stranger whom we have seen at the inn of The Leopard.

CHAPTER IV.

RATTLEPATE.

The singular individual who had given himself the still more singular name of Rattlepate paused on the door-sill, and before entering surveyed the parlor with a deliberate and solemn look.

"How every thing has changed," said he, in a tone which, despite its usual lightness, betrayed a deep emotion. "How old, and faded, and sad every thing is! This is the stately old parlor that was formerly thrown open only on great occasions."

Vonderspeight had somewhat recovered his presence of mind; he arose and advanced a few steps before his visitor.

"Sir," said he, bowing with affected politeness, "I do not know you, and am not aware to whom I owe the honor—"

The Nabob drew himself up and steadily regarded the master of the house. He suddenly broke into a loud laugh.

"By the Kaabah!" cried he, "were I to judge of myself by you, my poor Vonderspeight, it would not seem astonishing that you do not recognize me. Can twenty years change a man to this extent? You appear as old as the Brahmin Abdalla, whom I met on the banks of the Ganges, fishing for crocodiles, and Abdalla was two hundred years old!"

"Sir!" interrupted Vonderspeight, with visible anxiety.

Rattlepate seized with one hand the arm of the old man, while with the other he turned the reflector of the lamp full upon his countenance.

"You do not recognize me, and yet you tremble," said he, ironically. "Look at me well, Ralph Vonderspeight, formerly clerk in the establishment of Mery & Co., of New York; look at me, moreover, as closely as you wish; I have been rudely treated by fortune, on land and at sea; but I am always—"

"Would you still dare to carry your name in this place, where it is blighted and dishonored?" cried Vonderspeight, involuntarily.

"And why not?" replied the stranger with melancholy. "Time effaces all things. I have had a stormy youth, it is true; but only one person, perhaps, will ever have the right to curse me, and I learned, on my arrival, that this person disappeared a long time since. Enough of that, however," added he, curtly. "You know me, Vonderspeight; you know what brings me here. Serve up my supper, then, for I am thirsty, and the Rhine wine I drank at the Leopard has given me an appetite."

Saying this, he threw himself on a seat and stretched out his limbs with an air of wearisomeness.

Vonderspeight, notwithstanding his control over himself, appeared to be wonderfully troubled ; terror, indignation and despair made him blush and pale by turns. While he was hesitating, his look fell on Mrs. and Adele Marston, who were seated motionless and silent in the shade. He darted impulsively toward them.

" You still there ?" exclaimed he, rudely. " What are you doing ? Who detains you ? Would you spy my actions in my own house ?"

The two women trembled, each in the arms of the other. Never before had their hypocritical protector addressed them in this brutal tone.

" Friend," said the mother, embarrassed—" my dear Mr. Vonderspeight, neither my daughter nor I had any intention—"

" Leave us," sharply interrupted the proprietor.

Adele would have drawn away Mrs. Marston, but the mysterious Rattlepate politely approached them.

" Who is this, old hawk ?" said he to Vonderspeight, in a tone half pleasant, half serious. " Do you take me for a savage ? Let me tell you that I have seen yellow ladies in China, green in Java, black in Guinea, the aboriginal red of America, and white, more or less, everywhere, and have never been reproached for having been wanting in politeness toward the sex, whatever its color. Permit these ladies, therefore, to vouchsafe me the honor of their company. I trust they will condescend to sup with us, if their hour has not passed."

This strange unceremoniousness, this tone of command, so extraordinary in a sort of beggar, who had arrived in the city only a few hours since, bewildered the ladies and servant. The former did not know what to do, whilst Jerry, standing near the door, awaited the orders of his master, with his great consternated eyes wide open. This marvelous air of assurance had vividly struck Vonderspeight himself.

" To speak with so much self-possession," thought he, " the fellow must feel very sure of his rights ! Come ! I can not further delay recognizing him ; we must be resigned, then, until he may discover himself."

His countenance immediately changed, and his studied smile reappeared on his lips.

"My dear friends," said he, with a bland air, seizing the Nabob by the hand, "every thing that has just passed must appear to you very singular. You will pardon my anxiety and my involuntary roughness, when you know that my guest is Mr. Frank Mery, my former employer, who left these parts nearly twenty years ago."

"Wait! Wait!" said Mrs. Marston, borne away by curiosity; "I have some remembrance of that affair, for it made a great noise about the time of my marriage. I believe Mr. Mery had the misfortune to kill in a duel—"

"The brother of her whom he loved," said the traveler, with a grave, sad tone. "So, then, they still preserve here the memory of that melancholy affair! After so many years of exile, after so many fatigues, so many crosses, so many sufferings, I find, in putting foot on my native soil, this terrible souvenir present and living as in the first hour! But why should I complain? The poor girl of whose ruin I was the cause was more worthy of pity than I!"

The eyes of Frank Mery, for we henceforth know the real name of the traveler, became moist as he pronounced these words.

"Then you already know," asked Vonderspeight, "that the young woman disappeared from New York the day you embarked secretly on the *Jack Fowler*? Since then the most active searches have been unable to disclose her whereabouts."

"Indeed, they have told me that you, Vonderspeight, better than any one, would be apt to know the truth. But I forget that my words are obscure to you; I will soon explain them, in demanding an account of the trust I reposed with you."

The old man uttered a sort of groan; then he cried, with feverish activity, addressing himself to Jerry,

"Well! you great fool, what are you doing there? Have you not heard that Mr. Mery wishes to sup? Run to the kitchen, and bring him back quickly of the best. Mrs. Marston," continued he, looking at Adele's mother, "you will aid us a little; is it not so, my friend?"

"Willingly, Mr. Vonderspeight," replied the widow, with a sullen tone; "I am not spiteful, I—I knew how to excuse a

moment of excitement as soon as I guessed the first cause of your ill humor."

She cast an irritated look at her daughter, and went out grumbling.

Vonderspeight, without paying any attention to her, approached Jerry and gave him a few orders in a low voice. Meanwhile, Frank Mery found himself alone with Miss Marston, in the other end of the parlor.

"Miss Marston," said he, rapidly, "have courage. I am the friend of Oscar Flemyngh; he and I will watch over you!"

Poor Adele trembled at the sound of that vibrating and earnest voice. Her head rose, and her drooping eyes were reanimated.

"Ah! thanks! thanks!" murmured she. "So then, you have seen him? You have spoken to him?"

Mery placed one finger over his mouth and rejoined Vonderspeight, who, in his preoccupation, had perceived nothing of what had passed.

They served a substantial repast, in which Mery alone took part. The other persons of the house had already supped. The traveler soon recovered all his gayety, which had been a moment since subdued by sad memories; he narrated, with untiring animation, the principal episodes of his adventuresome life, from the time he had quitted New York. It was a career filled with shipwrecks, dangers, remarkable adventures and unheard-of prosperities. In the midst of these romantic events, the cosmopolitan Gil Blas had not always played the pleasantest rôle; he often forgot to narrate circumstances where necessity had made him commit acts undeserving enough of praise; but his auditors lost sight of these omissions. Mrs. Marston experienced a real admiration for the man who had so many times made a royal fortune, and Adele felt full of indulgence for her future protector, the friend of Oscar. As to Vonderspeight, he was listening to Mery with undivided attention, seeking in the facts, at times incoherent, of his narrative, the solution of an important problem; but, either by chance or calculation, the Nabob said nothing of a nature to satisfy his ardent curiosity in that direction.

The night was far advanced when the ladies thought of

retiring. Vonderspeight cut short all compliments, for he desired to converse freely with his guest—in taking leave of Adele, Mery found another opportunity to address her a few words of encouragement, and the young woman retired with a heart full of hope.

Vonderspeight and Mery remained alone in that vast and somber parlor. Although subjects of conversation were not wanting to them, they were obstinately silent, observing each other with the defiance of two enemies. The traveler had ceased eating; leaning his elbow on the table, he was playing with the sharp point of a knife. Vonderspeight took frequent snuffs from his horn box; behind his glasses his eyes were gleaming with cunning and penetration.

This silence lasted several minutes; at length the old man observed in that sweet tone which he knew how to assume as occasion might seem to require,

" You have spun some pretty yarns, master Frank; but if I am not deceived, you are not to-day in possession of the immense treasures amassed in your journeys beyond the sea. You return here like the prodigal child!"

" The prodigal child!" repeated Mery. " You well know, old fellow, that I have not been able, like him, to dissipate my heritage."

" Undoubtedly, undoubtedly, for you have been unable to carry it about with you."

" You pretend not to understand me. You ought to know very well, however, that in reappearing in my old home, I intend to reclaim the trust confided to your hands during my absence. This is the heritage of my father, and, after so many reverses, I would not be sorry to live the remainder of my days in peace."

Vonderspeight felt a cold sweat standing on his forehead.

" At the moment of your departure," replied he, in a choking voice, " you gave me all your goods, furniture and effects by deeds executed in due form."

" That is all very true, Vonderspeight; but you forget that sale was purely fictitious, for you signed yourself, beforehand, a declaration in authentic form, which annulled it. That declaration, that deed of defeasance, as they term acts of this kind, constituted you the sole depositary of my fortune; you

are thereby obliged to restore it to me on my first demand."

"But that instrument unquestionably no longer exists. After the account you have given of your eventful and adventurous life, I must necessarily conceive that this sheet of paper could hardly have escaped the pillages, the dangers and the shipwrecks of which we have just spoken."

"Well, if that should be the case," said Mery, mildly, "would the old, confidential clerk of my father, formerly reputed for his probity and his integrity, refuse a restitution which he knows to be legitimate? Would the loss of that document be a reason why the old servant of my family should repulse me, and detain that which belongs to me?"

"The deed of defeasance is lost, destroyed!" cried he, clapping his hands. "I know it well! One should never give himself up to despair!"

The traveler rose in his turn.

"Vonderspeight," said he, with firmness, "I do not wish to encourage the suspicions with which your words would inspire me; I do not wish to give faith to the reports circulating about the country discreditable to your name. It would cost me a pang to regard you a dishonest man and a criminal."

The old man laughed with a convulsive laugh, continuing in his walk back and forth across the room.

"Ha, ha, ha! The good story!" said he, as if to himself. "The poor boy returns as he departed.^{to} Of what use have been his travels, his misfortunes, his prosperity to him? He has not acquired experience; he is ever the same crack-brained youth that his father himself nicknamed Rattlepate! Aye, indeed; and never did any one better merit the *sobriquet* Rattlepate! He comes to claim from me the riches that I passed the first half of my life in desiring, and by which I have not yet been able to profit in the second half; and he holds no longer the precious paper by which he would oblige me to make restitution! He has lost it, poor child—poor simpleton—poor fool! He has lost it; ha, ha, ha! He has lost it!"

Frank Mery shrugged his shoulders.

"You are dispatching work quickly," replied he, coldly.

"Have I told you that instrument was lost, mutilated or destroyed? Is it so difficult to preserve a scrap of legal paper?"

Vonderspeight paused suddenly in his walk; all his terrors recurred to him at the same time.

"Then it was a test?" stammered he.

"Perhaps. At all events, that test would not have been favorable; moreover, I would be severe with a disloyal agent; you can wait."

The old man seemed to wish to read the depths of his interlocutor's heart; the latter supported the scrutiny with undisturbed assurance.

"No, no," at length replied the miser, obstinately, "and this paper has not been able to escape destruction. You have conceived some ruse to deceive me! But my eyes are open, and—"

"Do you imagine that my past misfortunes have had no influence on my character?" said Mery. "In other days, old knave, would I have suffered such insolence at your hands without attempting to break your bones? But, let us converse peaceably. Would it have been impossible for me to carry that famous defeasance with me in my adventurous peregrinations? What would you have said if I had left it in New York in safe hands?"

"I can not believe it. When you had departed, I investigated the matter most minutely; I suspected that this precious title had been left in trust with some one. I advised with every lawyer of your acquaintance. I implored and promised; but no one could give me any information on the subject."

"And undoubtedly you were thus influenced out of pure interest for me, my virtuous Vonderspeight! Wait; listen: I am going to reveal certain circumstances of which you appear to be still ignorant. I could not, in leaving these shores, forget the poor victim whom I made my wife, and our child; for you remember the devoted woman gave birth to a son at the moment of my terrible duel with her brother. On the same day, therefore, and prior to the execution of that document by which I concluded with you that feigned sale of my effects, I signed secretly, before another notary, a new document, by which I abandoned to my wife, or to her child, the revenue of the entire estate, of which I was the depositary.

To that document I attached the defeasance, a testament by which I disposed of my fortune, in the event I might die in my travels, and, finally, a letter in which I asked my wife's pardon for the sorrows I had caused her. I placed in the same sealed envelope these different papers, and put them in the hands of Notary S—, charging him to send them to Madeline."

"They were probably never delivered," said Vonderspeight, thoughtfully. "Nobody ever reclaimed any thing from me by virtue of these different instruments."

"I know it; and it is this that forces me to believe Madeline was unable to survive her shame and her misfortunes, and retired from her native city to die obscurely in some quiet and secluded inland town."

Mery uttered a deep sigh, and for a moment preserved silence.

"So, then," asked Vonderspeight, "these papers have remained in the hands of S—? He was never willing to admit, however, that he had a trust derived from you."

"That was his duty as an attorney."

"But S— is dead, and his successor—"

"Of what use this twaddle?" interrupted the Nabob, with an air of impatience. "The papers are intact, and that must suffice you; they will be shown when the proper time comes."

"But—but," stammered the old man, "have they, then, returned them to you?"

"Could they refuse to restore them to me? Do they not belong to me?"

"Of course; but then, since you have them with you, you might—"

"You are exceedingly curious," said Mery, ironically. "But enough for this evening," continued he, rising. "I feel the need of a little repose. Make your own reflections; they say that night brings its counsel. Employ your time well, *caro mio*; act loyally with me, and I will not dispute for the surrender of your accounts. Right or wrong, you are rich, very rich—I know it; even in restoring that which is mine, you can, if you are not niggardly, live in opulence. Believe me, then; loyalty and good faith will serve you better than ruse or violence."

Vonderspeight endured that species of lashing with great calmness.

"Certainly, my dear sir; we understand you very well. Yet," added he, insinuatingly, "if you were provided with that defeasance, and could put it under my eyes—"

"You shall see it, but not at present. I am very sleepy; in what chamber have you prepared my bed?"

"In the yellow chamber; Jerry will conduct you there."

He pulled an old bell-rope, and the servant appeared at the door, with a light.

"The yellow chamber," repeated the Nabob, "is very gloomy and solitary. It is there my old governess died, nearly forty years ago. But, as you please! I fear nothing, living or dead. Good-night, Vonderspeight. May God inspire you with thoughts of peace and conciliation!"

While speaking, he took, without any affectation, from the table, the knife of which he had already examined the point, and put it in his pocket; then, making a sign to the servant to precede him, he issued from the apartment with the firmest and most confident step.

The old man breathed heavily, and took methodically between his fingers a pinch of snuff.

"Come," said he, at length, "I shall escape him beautifully! Fortunately, Rattlepate is always the same. He has the defeasance in his pocket; I guessed as much. Before two hours shall have elapsed, I will mock at his threats!"

He remained absorbed in somber meditations until the return of the servant aroused him.

"Jerry," said he, sharply, "I shall soon require two strong men for a little private business. I can not rely on you; despite your size and power, a child could upset you; again, you are so awkward. Has the captain arrived?"

"He is now unloading his cargo at the port of the gray rocks."

"And Schauss?"

"He is working with the rest."

"Well; you may tell the captain and Schauss to come here as soon as the goods are landed and packed. I will detain them only a short time. Bring them in without any noise, by the garden-gate."

"I will go and bring them." And Jerry went out again.

"All promises well," murmured Vonderspeight. "But this fool is very strong, and he is armed. We must be prudent; we must wait until he is sound asleep."

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT.

Let us return to Oscar Flemyngh, whom we left directing his steps toward the Red House. He carefully avoided the beaten path, and laboriously gained the rocky heights that overlooked the garden. The ascent was rude, if not perilous, by reason of the obscurity, and especially the wind which almost blinded the poor lover. But Oscar seemed to have made a careful study of the locality; despite all obstacles, he soon attained the summit of a massive gray rock, rising to a point above the walls of the enclosure. Then, his forehead bathed with sweat, and his hands disfigured by the unevenness of the slate, he seated himself to breathe.

From the place where he was seated, he could look down upon the valley or gorge, at the bottom of which arose the Red House. That valley descended by a declivity quite steep enough toward the Hudson, whose waves might be seen through the trees. The picturesque heights of the opposite shore stood forth in the starlight, producing a strange effect of shade and light. The declivity immediately beneath Oscar was plunged in profound darkness. It was a shadowy chaos, somber with maples, elms and evergreens, where the sight became lost or the wind appeared to swallow it up with rage. The house itself was hardly visible; only a window detached itself in a luminous quadrate from its dark front. That window belonged to the parlor where Frank Mery was at this moment receiving the hospitality of the house.

Oscar guessed as much, and his eyes remained for a long time attached to that quarter.

"They are not in the habit of remaining awake so late at the Red House," murmured he. "This singular personage must really be a man of importance in the eyes of Vonderspeight. Will he remember his promise to me? Will he endeavor to protect Adele? I have been wrong, perhaps, not to repose faith in him. But what matters it, after all? Now I am decided to act alone. Let us act, then!"

He rose quickly and set himself to work. A strong brace or clasper of iron had been recently fastened in the rock; to this clasper was attached a great knotted rope, carefully concealed under the moss and stones. For several days, or rather several nights, Oscar had prosecuted in secret these preparations; on the night preceding only had they been terminated. Yet he had kept the circumstance mysteriously concealed from the unknown guest at The Leopard, the vague promises and conditions of Mery not having appeared sufficiently encouraging.

He let the end of the rope fall in the garden of the Red House; he satisfied himself that the addition of his weight would not tear out the clasper fastened to the rock by his unskilled hands, and then prepared to descend into the premises of the redoubtable Vonderspeight.

At the moment he was about embarking in his enterprise, a reflection detained him.

"What am I about doing?" thought he. "Was not this traveler right in engaging me to avoid imprudent steps? May my project not result in unnecessarily compromising Adele? What shall I gain by entering this lonely garden?"

Unquestionably this problem was not easy to solve, for Oscar continued restless with uncertainty on the narrow platform of the rock.

"Pshaw! Pshaw! Nothing without hazard!" resumed he. "The poor girl probably sleeps some; but if she would only be struck with the happy idea of appearing at her window to breathe the fresh night air!" (The young man's illusion was great, since the wind was blowing with a violence apt to deter the most romantic girl from the feeblest desire of this kind.) "Yes; if she would do that, I could show myself and address her a few words in a low voice. In the other event, I will approach her chamber-window, by the aid

of the fruit wall, and deposit my letter in one of those flower-pots that she waters every morning with her own hands. Tomorrow, on waking, she will find the paper, through which I shall indicate a means of her corresponding secretly with me. Again, I will be nearer my Adele ; I will breathe the air she breathes. Yes, yes ; God will assist me."

Of what is not a young and ardent man capable, who loves for the first time ? Oscar, convinced that he had excellent reasons for undertaking his rash enterprise, resolutely seized the cable and launched over the side of the rock.

In the course of his descent, it seemed to him that he heard below him a noise of steps and voices. He remained motionless, holding fast to the cord, whose constant oscillations had lacerated his fingers against the angles of the stone. He cast his eyes downward ; nothing had stirred in the garden, but in the cross-road which ran along its walls a file of mules loaded with bundles was slowly and cautiously advancing. The adventurer smiled on recognizing the cause of his fright.

"These are the mules that carry his contraband merchandise," murmured he. "Decidedly, Vonderspeight will have enough to occupy him to-night. Courage!"

A few minutes after, he touched the soil of the garden. It was time ; his strength was exhausted, his hands were bleeding, and his body was bruised by its jostlings against the rock.

While he was taking breath, a secret door looking upon the river-side suddenly opened and two men entered the garden. Oscar hastily threw himself into an evergreen thicket, which the thick foliage covered with its dark shade, and remained motionless, holding his breath.

The two men walked a few steps into a path close by. They frequently turned their eyes toward the partially-opened door, as if they were expecting a third person. As they advanced, they conversed in Dutch, and Oscar could understand their words, though not conversant with the language, at that time preserved by many of the lineal descendants of the early settlers of Manhattan Island.

"The devil !" said a sharp and disagreeable voice. "A pretty idea in Mynheer Vonderspeight to call us here when he has so much more need of our assistance on the coast and the

road! It will be mere chance if the captain can leave his vessel just now."

"The captain promised to come as soon as possible," replied Jerry, in his vacant manner. "It would be fine for either of you to disobey him who has put bread into your mouths."

"Heaven preserve us from such a wish! We are ready for his orders. Is there any thing new at the Red House?"

"Hum! There arrived here to-night a great rascal, whose appearance has not been agreeable to Mynheer Vonderspeight. He has surely some injury to avenge."

"Indeed! One of those affairs that often put good Christians at the risk of manacles and striped jackets, constables and magistrates? Really I can refuse nothing to good Mynheer Vonderspeight, for whom I would do any thing. Who is this new-comer, who has so unexpectedly turned up?"

"I don't know; an old friend of master's, I think."

"An old friend! Do you see that? The best of friends always end by coming to the knife. I had a comrade in my boyhood for whom I would have laid down my life; one day, from no cause, he planted his knife in my side and escaped himself. Six months after, I sent a bullet through his head, without giving him time to know whence it came. It was too bad, for, on my faith, we were good friends—like two fingers of my hand, Peter and I."

At this moment a third person entered the garden and directed himself with a precipitate step toward Jerry and his companion.

"Are you there, Schauss?" demanded a rank voice.

"It is I, captain, and I am waiting for you. You know that mynheer wants us?"

"Yes, I know it; and may all the devils confound him for having disturbed us to-night! What does he want?"

"A funny commission; he wishes to put an old friend to sleep."

"And for such trifles we must risk the loss of our vessel?" said the captain, with an accent of rage; "at all events a blow of the knife is very quickly given. Where is Vonderspeight?"

"In the parlor. Come, for he is impatient," replied Jerry

They all advanced toward the house, while the captain continued to pour forth the most frightful blasphemies.

Oscar was stupid, frozen with terror. The words of the smugglers had not been, perhaps, distinctly understood by him ; but he had heard enough to realize that a murder was likely to occur at the Red House. He did not yet precisely know whether Vonderspeight's guest was a friend or an enemy ; yet, alarmed at the danger that threatened the unfortunate traveler, he reflected as to the means of giving him aid ; or, at least, as to how he might put him on his guard. But what could he do in that strange house against these reckless smugglers, in the profound obscurity ?

" Yet I can not leave Adele surrounded by such a band of robbers and cut-throats," thought he, " without assuring myself, to some extent, of what is passing here ; humanity orders me to enter that horrible dwelling. It will not do to hesitate ; I must enter, and act according to circumstances. Who knows but I may be able to save Adele from some impending danger ? "

He advanced furtively toward the house, of which the door stood open behind the smugglers. After having deposited his boots in a corner, in order to make no noise, he glided, like a shadow, into the interior of the Red House ; then, passing rapidly before the parlor, where he heard the voices of Vonderspeight and the smugglers in earnest conversation, he gained the staircase, up which he groped.

On reaching the summit, the silence and obscurity were still more intense. Oscar, unable to decide which way to direct his steps, wandered a moment at hap-hazard in a large corridor, which extended from one end to the other of the spacious house. Suddenly he heard the murmur of voices in conversation quite near himself, and beheld a feeble ray of light escaping through the crevices of a door. Cautiously approaching, he bent forward his ear. Two persons were talking together in the apartment ; one was speaking in an imperious and irritated tone, and the other responding in a low voice broken by sobs. Oscar felt his heart beat with violence ; he had recognized the voices of Mrs. Marston and Adele.

It was they, in fact ; both, still standing, had not yet thought of delivering themselves up to sleep. Adele was

sustaining against her irascible mother one of those painful struggles, in which she could find for a defense only her tears.

"I tell you, ungrateful child," exclaimed Mrs. Marston, "that your ridiculous headstrongness is daily exciting against us our benefactor, who will end by driving us out of his house. This evening, he was rude to us, in the presence of that stranger, as he had never been before. If you push him to extremes, what will happen to us, I ask you? Where shall we go? What shall we do? Must we renew our miserable life of other days? For myself, I declare it, I am tired of discreditable poverty."

"Mother," interrupted Adele, earnestly, "poverty is not discreditable when one can support it nobly and with courage. Alas! Why do you not prefer that free, proud poverty to the life of sadness, humiliation and hypocrisy that brings you here? How courageously I would have labored to satisfy your wants, to procure peaceful days! You know it well, I have some skill at embroidery and in other female employments; if you are unwilling to return to —, it will be easy for me to find work in New York, and I could earn enough—"

"The work of an embroideress! A nice calling for the widow or daughter of you dear father! Work by the day, when we might mingle in the best society, and maintain a high position here! At length, miss, put an end to this prattle. I will not permit you, through your foolish obstinacy, to cause your ruin and mine!"

"Your ruin, mother!" said the poor girl, with despair. "May God preserve me from ever contributing to that! I would give my life to feel that you were happy!"

"These are merely romantic phrases, miss; when one loves her mother, she dreams only of obeying her, and of assuring her an agreeable future, at the price of even a sacrifice."

"I will make every possible sacrifice for you, mother! Yes, all save that of giving my hand to that man. He inspires me only with horror and disgust."

"You shall give it to him, however," replied Mrs. Marston, with a firm tone, "and I rely on announcing to him, to-morrow, that this marriage will very soon take place. We shall see if you will dare to contradict your mother!"

"May God pardon me!" said the poor girl, with a broken voice, "but I will have the strength to dare."

"Mad creature! Unnatural child! But, patience! We shall find who controls you. Who encourages you to defy my authority? Can it be that miserable attorney whom you have found the means of attracting hither? A driveler who has nothing, and whom you prefer to one of the richest and most influential men of the island?"

"The memory of Oscar will sustain me, mother, if he can not himself come to my aid. But perhaps heaven has already sent me another protector!"

"A protector, miss! I do not understand you."

The young lady was silent; that allusion had escaped her in her perplexity, but she would not betray the secret of Frank Mery.

"You do not answer me! What does that mean? You have, I am aware, received some information from others, as that letter you sent secretly to Flemyng will attest. But I will make it henceforth impossible for you to practice such deception; they shall not get the start and again find me wanting in watchfulness; I moreover wish to know this new friend on whom you appear to rely. But, while I think, it may perchance be this Mr. Mery? I recollect, indeed, that for a moment he spoke to you in an undertone. And then he stopped at the Leopard, where he probably met your sweetheart. Ay, ay, it is he, and he undoubtedly brings you some letter or message."

"Nay, mother," responded Adele, sobbing, "no letter or message. He only uttered a word of pity; but a word of pity is very precious when one is abandoned by all—even her mother!"

"Not by all, Adele! No, indeed; not by all!" murmured an animated voice behind her.

The ladies trembled and raised their heads; Oscar had noiselessly entered the chamber.

On beholding him, they uttered a simultaneous cry; happily, the wind which was whistling violently about the Red House, prevented its being heard. Oscar hastened to their sides.

"Adele! Mrs. Marston!" said he, earnestly. "Silence! In heaven's name!—It is the matter of a life!"

The ladies were hushed, for they had recognized him ; Adele extended to him her hand, which he covered with kisses, whilst the widow regarded him with a look in which astonishment was mingled with apprehension and rage.

"How did you enter?" asked she with a trembling voice. "What do you want? Did ever any one hear of such things!"

Oscar did not respond ; he pressed the young lady's hand to his heart and covered it with caresses.

"This is a manifestation of Divine protection!" said Adele, with artless joy, raising her eyes to heaven. "God has wished to create a miracle for a poor, despairing girl."

"A felon could alone introduce himself thus into a respectable house, into our very chamber!" replied Mrs. Marston. "I am going to call Jerry and Mr. Vonderspeight, and we shall know—"

Adele detained her.

"In pity's name, mother, call no one!" murmured she. "He will withdraw, or, at least, tell us why he is here."

"I am here to prevent a murder."

"A murder!" repeated the two frightened women.

"Ay; this stranger, who came here this evening to demand the hospitality of the Red House—that singular man, who has interested us so much without our knowing why, they design murdering."

"Who, sir?"

"The owner of this house, the miserable Vonderspeight, whom you would give for a husband to your daughter!"

"It is a calumny! It is impossible! Vonderspeight! A man of his age!"

"He is too cowardly to execute himself his abominable project ; but the assassins are already in the house. Show me quickly the chamber of the unfortunate stranger. I will warn him ; I will put him on his guard ; I will defend him, if it be necessary?"

The two ladies were stupefied.

"No, no," replied the old widow, "this is an imposition. I will never believe that a man with Vonderspeight's riches—"

"Mother," said the young lady, shuddering, "this evening his eye seemed really terrible as he looked upon Mr. Mery."

"Mr. Mery! The old employer of Vonderspeight! Then no longer doubt. Mr. Mery, if I may judge from a few words that escaped him in my presence, has interests of the greatest importance to settle with Vonderspeight, who would get him out of his way. Adele, in heaven's name! where is the apartment of poor Mery? I have already delayed to long before coming to his aid."

"There, at the end of this hall," said the young woman, designating the other extremity of the house; but, I implore you, Oscar, not to expose yourself to useless danger."

"Adele, Mr. Mery has interested himself in our sad fate; he is our friend!"

And he would have gone forth; but the young woman still detained him.

"And we? What is going to become of us?" said Mrs. Marston, seriously frightened, in spite of herself; "without believing in the outrage Mr. Flemyngh apprehends, we must—"

A loud noise, like that of a struggle in which furniture is overturned, came from the direction of Mery's chamber; almost immediately cries of pain ensued, mingled with threats and imprecations.

"It is too late!" cried the young man, turning pale. "The crime is accomplished! No matter! I must rejoin the unfortunate man. Perhaps I may still be of some assistance to him!"

"Stay! Stay! Oscar! They will kill you, also!" murmured Adele, holding on to his garments.

The young man promptly disengaged himself from her embrace, and darted toward the chamber. Adele would have recalled him, but her voice expired on her lips, and she fell fainting upon her couch. Mrs. Marston, a prey to terror which it would be impossible to define, immediately barricaded her door with care.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SERVITOR'S "LITTLE GAME."

THE chamber into which Frank Mery was escorted was an apartment of dilapidated, somber and lugubrious aspect. Old wall-paper, formerly of a yellow pattern, torn in many places and covered with mould, had given it the name it bore. It was filled with dark and faded furniture. In the alcove stood a large bed, apparently flat and hard ; the counterpane of cameo color was decorated with fantastical figures ; the curtains of the same material, were literally worn out. To be brief, the traveler had no reason to vaunt the hospitality which was accorded him in his hereditary dwelling.

When the domestic had retired, he left a candle-stump in a white iron taper-stand, by the light of which Frank Mery, standing in the middle of the room, with his hands in his pockets, put himself slowly to the task of scrutinizing the surroundings.

"Nothing has changed here since the death of my poor old governess," he muttered, "now thirty-five years ago. It is still the same arrangement of the same old furniture ; I believe, also, that this is the same bed, with the same curtains and coverlets ! The old fox has not exhausted his resources in improvements and repairs. I trust that old Maria will not return during the night to dispute with me her couch ! Egad, the visit would not be to my liking. But it is visits of quite another kind I must fear. Either I am greatly deceived, or I am very likely to behold here, to-night, my dear friend Vonderspeight, alone or in company ; I have made him understand a little too distinctly, perhaps, that I have on my person that cursed defeasance. He pressed me too hard ; I was forced to go further than I wished."

He reflected for several instants, until, with his arms crossed over his breast, he finally seated himself before his bed.

"In what satanic enterprise am I embarked ?" resumed he,

pensively. "How will it all end? Yet I would sooner be impaled than abandon it, for I have no means of avoiding the difficulty, however it may end. Vonderspeight is the greatest knave in the world, and will be as long as he lives. I can only watch that I may not be taken unawares."

He drew from his pocket the knife with which he had armed himself, and concealed it behind his pillow; then seizing the light, he examined the lock of the door. That lock could not be turned inside, and he had neither bolt nor bar to protect him against nocturnal intrusion. Undismayed, Mery drew forward an old table, with crooked legs, which he set against the door; on the table he mounted a massive oak arm-chair, and behind the arm-chair he placed a flower-pot full of water, which must fall at the least shock. These strange preparations ended, he examined, with a satisfied air, the scaffolding he had erected.

"That will warn me if I am disturbed," said he. "I am now *tabou*, as the savages of the Pacific would say; no one can approach without my knowing it. Again, I shall sleep with only one eye shut."

He again made the tour of his chamber, to assure himself there was no other possible entrance or point of approach; then he contented himself with removing his vest, pulling his fur cap over his eyes and throwing himself on his bed, where he soon fell asleep without any other precautions.

A few hours had sped when three men cautiously ascended the staircase and directed their steps toward the end of the hall where Frank Mery lodged. The one who was walking in advance with lantern in hand, was a personage in sailor's costume, of hang-dog look; exceedingly annoyed, or at least very much displeased with that nocturnal work, he was mumbling horrible oaths; this was the captain of the little contraband craft then at anchor in a neighboring cove. Behind him came Schauss, his second or his lieutenant on shipboard, a little, thin, shabby man, with whom ruse and physical dexterity supplied the place of ordinary force. Vonderspeight was third, and, although he could not take an active part in what was plotting, he was the palest and most agitated of the three.

"You understand well my wishes, my friends," said he, in a

low tone, and walking with a cautious step. " You must not strike a death-blow ; I would not have him killed. For it is known he is here, and I could render no account of his disappearance—if he should disappear. You must be very prudent ; be content to simply get possession of certain papers he has about him, and bring them immediately to me. Should he wake too soon, however, you may rely on his making an energetic resistance."

" So much the better," growled the captain.

" So much the worse," grumbled Schauss.

" You must be careful not to wake him too soon," said the master of the Red House, " and in that matter I can give you some useful suggestions. While he was retiring, I glided into a neighboring apartment, through a chink in the closet of which I was able to see his preparations for defense, for I apprehended before I left him that he was on guard. He threw himself dressed upon his bed, a certain proof that the papers are concealed in his garments. He must now be in profound darkness, for we took the precaution of furnishing him with only a candle-end, already consumed some time since. This, therefore, is what you have to do ; you will slowly open the door in a manner to move aside, without upsetting it, the furniture he has piled up behind it ; with time, patience, and a little address, that will not be impossible. You will introduce yourself noiselessly into the chamber and go straight to the bed, which is situated to the left. You can snatch the papers from his person before he wakes ; then I will enter with the lantern and answer for what follows."

" But, the devil ! We are wasting infinite time in these maneuvers !" said the captain, " and my bark will not rest easy on the shore. Again, I do not know how to take so many precautions ; I shall certainly overturn the barricade and spoil every thing."

" No, no, captain ; everybody is sleeping in the house ; you will accomplish all in the deepest silence," returned Vonderspeight.

" Well, if you will consent, captain," said Schauss, with a modest air, " I will undertake to open the door, without making any more noise than a mouse. When I was a sailor on board the *Bravo*, they all praised me for my adroitness in

robbing provisions from the steward's mate. You will see ; we shall be in the cabin before you can finish your prayers."

Vonderspeight thanked him with a subdued voice, and promised the most bountiful rewards if he should succeed.

They had reached the yellow chamber. Schauss made a sign to his companions to remain motionless, and, after having applied his ear for a moment to the door, set himself immediately to the task.

He first raised, with the greatest precaution, the latch, which Mery had fastened on the inside with quite negligence enough ; the door was then held only by the furniture piled up on the other side ; crouching on the floor, the fellow strove to push it slowly. He employed his fingers and nails with marvelous dexterity and without respite, resuming his work when the fracas of the wind covered the creaking of the furniture, which he put aside by an almost insensible movement.

The captain, seated on the floor, stormed, in suppressed tones, at the delay. Vonderspeight was incessantly encouraging the laborer ; but, despite himself, he seemed to experience some uneasiness. He had heard a noise in the direction of the chamber of his lady guests ; he regretted that, in the midst of his graver preoccupations, he had forgotten to go and assure himself that they were sleeping. It was now too late to repair that negligence. For nothing in the world would he have been willing to turn aside as the two smugglers entered the yellow chamber.

The important moment was approaching ; the opening gradually increased until it soon became large enough to admit the assailants. Nothing had been deranged in the bulwark constructed by the besieged ; not a drop of water contained in the vase had been overturned. Still, had any one been enabled to observe Mery in the obscurity, they might have seen him, on the first movement of the door, raise himself slowly upon his elbow and listen in silence, while his eyes gleamed like those of a savage cat.

Certain, after an attentive examination, that he was going to be attacked, he seized his knife from under his pillow, and glided nimbly from his couch, murmuring,

" *Allah akbar !* This was decreed. We are going to dance the *bamboula !*"

The opening was at length large enough to permit the aggressors to pass. Then Schauss rose, and, although he appeared to fear no immediate danger, yielded with an air of politeness to the captain, the honor of first entering the yellow chamber. The smuggler, furious at the loss of time, was going to enter impetuously, when Vonderspeight detained him by the arm.

"Once again, recollect, captain," said he, "in what embarrassment I would be involved if you should kill him."

"But, if he defends himself?"

"He will not defend himself. Moreover—"

"Live or die," growled the captain, "we will make an end of this!"

He entered the chamber without much precaution; Schauss followed him with a more careful step. Vonderspeight took the lantern to light them, but he dared not cross the door-sill.

The two smugglers ran to the bed-side to find the couch empty. They were returning to advise Vonderspeight of that circumstance, when a dark shade rose before them. A robust arm descended upon the captain's head, and he fell like a mass, uttering a heavy groan; never had human fist inflicted more formidable blow.

Schauss was not gifted, as the reader has undoubtedly guessed, with an overcharge of courage. Finding himself confronted by an invisible enemy, he was seized with fright, and commenced running about the chamber, calling on Vonderspeight for assistance. He was followed desperately, and the redoubtable fist encountered several times the sorry figure of the smuggler. During the struggle, the combatants ran against the furniture, which lost its balance and rolled with a crash upon the floor. It was this noise, and the piercing cries that accompanied it, which had resounded at the other extremity of the house.

Vonderspeight, standing before the door, lantern in hand, was in a terrible state of anxiety. He knew not whether to enter or fly. The apprehension that a murder might be committed in his house, decided him to advance a step, and he cast a timid look into the chamber.

The captain was still lying at the foot of the bed, and

gradually resuming his consciousness. Schauss, all out of breath, was running from one end to the other of the chamber, whilst Mery, half clad, was pursuing him without respite, and at every encounter dealing him a blow from his fist with force enough to stun an ox.

"Aha! My blackguards!" said the guest, mockingly. "I will teach you to respect the repose of a traveler. I will give you a plate of my own cooking! I received lessons, at Batavia, from an honorable gentleman who never had his equal as a boxer, and ended by knocking all his teeth down his throat. I am also going to extract yours."

Really, poor Schauss was in the most pitiable state; his blood was flowing in abundance.

"Pity! Pity, sir!" cried he, throwing himself on his knees. "Do not kill me! I am a brave man! Do not kill me, I pray you!"

Mery had already lifted his arm to give a last blow; he let it fall, smiling.

"Ha, ha! You have received, then, *your* account? You are sufficiently rubbed down, I trust. But, is that you, Vonderspeight, my excellent friend, worthy master of the house?" added he, turning towards the old clerk, who held himself at a distance, fortified behind an overturned table. "Well! Are you satisfied with the manner in which I have received your messengers? I have a great mind to make you taste the same royal fare."

The old man recoiled, stammering forth a few unintelligible words. During this scene, the captain, of whom we have almost lost sight, had gradually recovered his senses; devoured by a desire for vengeance, he arose, and drawing forth one of those dagger-knives with which men of his profession are ordinarily armed, suddenly bounded towards Mery, uttering a savage cry.

Mery appeared to be in no wise moved by that new attack. He backed against the wall, drew out his knife, in his turn, dexterously parried the thrust of his adversary and said, with his unalterable sang-froid, holding himself constantly on guard,

"So, so! a duel *a la Navajo*? We also understand how to use *that* tool. I have exercised more than once, at Havana,

with the brave matador José Sylva y Rosas, who never missed a bull in the circus of Seville."

"Stop!" cried Vonderspeight, with a choking voice. "There has been enough blood spilled! Captain, I will give you all the money you want. Mery, I pledge my word you need be no longer disturbed on account of that cursed paper. Schauss," continued he, addressing the smuggler, who was seated piteously on the floor, "assist me to disarm them."

"Holy Mother!" responded Schauss, in a lamentable tone of voice, "what do you ask of me? He has broken, crushed, mashed all my bones! He is the very fiend—that fellow!"

The two adversaries heard neither the entreaties of Vonderspeight nor the lamentations of Schauss. Standing face to face, with their bodies thrown into the shade and their arms extended, they remained in complete immobility, each watching the countenance, and striving to read when the first movement would be made on the part of the other. By the uncertain light of the lantern, their knives and their eyes gave forth the most sinister gleams.

At length, the smuggler, carried away with rage, rushed blindly on Mery, and would have struck him in his sword-arm. The latter, supple and nervous, however, carefully avoided the attack, and endeavored to profit by the circumstance of his enemy's being uncovered, to strike him in his turn. Unfortunately, he did not perceive an arm-chair that had fallen in his path; he stumbled and fell over it.

Quick to profit by this advantage, the smuggler threw himself upon him, and, holding fast to the arm with which the traveler again essayed to parry the blow, he raised his knife to kill him.

A cry was suddenly heard; some one forcibly detained the captain's hand, exclaiming,

"Wretch! Do not strike!"

It was Oscar. After wandering a moment in the obscurity, he arrived in time to prevent a horrid crime.

Mery profited by this diversion to disengage himself from the clutches of his rival. In an instant, he was standing and on his guard, ready to resume the combat.

The unexpected presence of the young man, in the midst

of that tumultuous scene, quite stupefied Vonderspeight and his associates.

"Vonderspeight," said Oscar, earnestly, "then your house is a den of thieves where those who seek refuge are assassinated? If you do not fear God, do you not fear human justice? It will certainly demand of you an explanation of what has here transpired, under your eyes and by your order."

Vonderspeight lifted his lantern so as to light up the countenance of the young man.

"By my eyes!" cried he. "This is the lover! How did he enter here?"

"Egad! by the beard of the prophet!" exclaimed Mery, in his turn, "this is my brave little friend of The Leopard. Who ever thought I should meet *him* again to-night! Well, my boy, you can boast of having rendered me a famous service just now; that angry beast of a smuggler was going to make a villainous hole in my vest. A thousand thanks! I do not know why, my boy, but I would sooner have you do this service than any one else in the world!"

And he extended his hand to Oscar Flemyngh, without relinquishing his watchfulness of the ferocious captain.

Vonderspeight was vividly agitated; he foresaw, with terror, what would probably be the result of this new incident. Advancing toward the captain, he whispered,

"Our safety now depends on decisive action. I would have spared them; but it is at present unnecessary to think longer of that. Captain, at any price we must put both of these men out of harm's way."

"Blast you and your affairs!" responded the smuggler, with an irritated look. "My head is ready to burst. We better not have interfered in what did not concern us. For your weight in gold I would not another minute remain away from my vessel. She can not be riding at anchor very easily below there, on the coast."

"How! captain," said Vonderspeight, alarmed, "will you abandon me? To-morrow they will make a complaint against you, and—"

"Of what will they accuse me? Of having received a terrible thrashing? If I am to be pursued for *that*, your land-lubbers will find me on shipboard, where they will soon

know whom to address. "Come!" continued he, addressing Schauss, "are you going to deliver yourself up, coward?"

"Alas! captain," sighed Schauss, without budging, "I can neither lie down, nor sit, nor stand. I am as completely helpless as if I had fallen from the highest point of a frigate's mast on deck."

Frank Mery, who, during that conversation, had remained with Oscar at the other extremity of the chamber, advanced toward the disconcerted mariner.

"Wait, comrade," said he, with singular good nature, vigorously assisting him to rise; "your enemies are not Turks. It is I who have put you in your present state, and it is for me to aid you, now that the battle is over. Come, my brave man, this little brush must not discourage you; whatever you wish, I will give you your revenge."

"Nay, nay," responded poor Schauss. "I thank you, sir; I seek no revenge; my miserable carcass is good for nothing."

Mery smiled maliciously.

"And to you, my valiant swordsman," resumed he, addressing himself to the captain, "I bear no rancor! Whenever it may please you to renew our pass *a la Navajo*, I shall be at your service; only, another time, we shall have no armchair to stumble over. Till we meet again, then, my dear friend, good-by and better luck."

The two smugglers scarcely paused, but hastened hobbling through the hall outside.

"Those who come to seek the wool are returning shorn," said Mery, clapping his hands after they had disappeared. "And now, my good Vonderspeight, my respected friend," continued he, turning toward the master of the house, "we will converse freely, if you are willing."

Vonderspeight stood like one stunned at the result of that scene; he saw himself at the mercy of his enemy. Yet he forced an appearance of calmness and even playfulness.

"I hope, master Frank," said he, attempting to smile, "you will not take a bad joke as serious. You must have heard me expressly recommend the fellows not to do you any evil. I only wished to oblige you to show me that paper of which it is so important for me to know the contents; these poor

rascals, whom you have so ill-used, were simply charged with the task of learning whether you really had that document about you—nothing more, I assure you."

"Very obliging, indeed! Well, we shall see what the magistrate will think of these charming proceedings. Mr. Flemyngh will take me to-morrow before the nearest justice, and I will disclose to him the details of this affair. Friend Oscar can also bear witness to the delicate manner in which this block-head, whom you call the captain, was inviting me, knife in hand, to show him the paper in question."

"No threats," said Vonderspeight, in a hollow voice. "You are still in my power."

"Come, then! You are too cowardly to attack me or encourage others to do so, now that I have a companion disposed to assist me!"

"And I would defend you, sir," said Oscar, earnestly, "at the risk of my own life."

"You better take care of yourself! You introduced yourself into the Red House, at night, while everybody was asleep; I can consider you a felon and a traitor as well as the other."

"That would not be prudent, my excellent Vonderspeight," replied Oscar. "The ladies Marston saw me enter here; if I should not reappear, your authority would not be equal to imposing silence on them."

"The ladies Marston!" repeated Vonderspeight, frightened. "Are they not asleep? They could not have heard—"

"They know most of what has passed here, and their testimony will not be favorable to you. Again, the host and hostess of The Leopard saw Mr. Mery and myself depart, this evening, for the Red House."

"You are cornered on all sides, poor Vonderspeight," observed Mery, with an ironical expression of pity. "Come! Be resigned; you have been worsted, and must learn to submit to the dictum of the conqueror. Listen! I will be generous to you as to the others; I will offer you peace on certain conditions."

"Peace!" cried Vonderspeight, impressively. "Oh! speak! Speak!"

"When I say peace, it is a truce I would say. At length,

I consent to forget your beautiful exploits of to-night, and to accord you a delay of fifteen days to render me your accounts, if you will, in your turn, accord what I demand of you."

"What are your conditions?"

"First," said Mery, with a searching eye, "you will furnish me a hundred guineas without any parley. I would be appropriately clad, in order to reappear in my native land a true nabob."

"All right," said Vonderspeight. "You shall have the money to-morrow morning, or this very evening if you desire it."

"That is well, *banare*, (which, in the glib of Cayenne, is to say *my friend*). The other condition is that you will not further oppose the marriage of my rescuer, Mr. Flemyng, here present, with Miss Marston, your ward, and that the brave boy may be admitted daily into her society while awaiting the necessary formalities in anticipation of the wedding."

The young man, without speaking, grasped Mery's hand. Vonderspeight winced.

"Miss Marston is not my ward," responded he. "She depends entirely on her mother."

"So be it; then it will suffice for you to promise not to interfere with our designs; we will treat with the mother."

Vonderspeight hesitated a moment.

"Is that all?" inquired he, at length.

"Nearly. Ah! Furthermore, that during the fifteen days' amnesty I may dispose of the house as I wish, and receive the different members of my family, which was once quite numerous, and which I do not imagine has since diminished. I wish to celebrate my return among my excellent relatives."

The greedy old man again reflected.

"But you ask me to be absolutely master in my—in our house," said he, at length. "You will at least justify my action in your behalf by showing me the paper that—"

"Bah! man, you are becoming tiresome by your incessant recurrence to the same thing!" cried Mery, with impatience. "You shall see this paper when we definitely settle our accounts; you shall see it in the presence of an attorney and two witnesses, through a glass thick enough to prevent your tearing it furtively. This is when and how you shall see that

defeasance, and not sooner or otherwise. Meanwhile, I am going to put it in a safe place, in order that you may not again renew the attempt of to-night. Believe me; do not show yourself too untractable and we may yet be able to effect together an amicable arrangement, which you will find decidedly more to your profit."

"Well!" replied Vonderspeight. "You promise, then, that neither you nor this young man will ever repeat to any one the incidents of to-night?"

"We promise," said Mery, with assurance.

"And then you promise to sustain, to-morrow morning, the story I shall repeat to the ladies, to avert their suspicion?"

"You may repeat as many stories as you wish; no one will contradict you."

"This is a concluded agreement," said Vonderspeight, sighing.

"Admirable," replied Mery. "But, let us recapitulate; I am to have my hundred guineas, that I may receive all my acquaintances at the Red House, as I fancy—"

"And I am to marry Miss Adele Marston?" cried Oscar.

"Yes, yes!" replied Vonderspeight, in a choked voice.

"Beware not to retract!" cried the Nabob. "Hold well to all your stipulations, old man, for I shall be watching you. You may have already discovered that it is not easy to deceive or to surprise me; your efforts in that direction have been foiled. Come, now that peace is concluded, do me the favor to leave me alone here till day-break with my companion, my brave Flemyngh, who came so opportunely to my relief. Send us two or three bottles of your oldest wine by Jerry, and good-night. You must need a little respite, to hatch, at your convenience, some new wickedness; only be content to plan, and not to prosecute."

Despite these sarcasms, Vonderspeight addressed a few mild sentences to the two friends, to accomplish what he considered a reconciliation; then he bade them adieu with a very humble expression, and went out.

"I have fifteen days before me," thought he. "This is longer than I require to checkmate them."

On the other hand, Oscar, left alone with Mery, grasped the latter's hand.

"My friend, what would I not do for you?" exclaimed he, excitedly. "You will have completed my happiness!"

"Do not be in a hurry to thank me," replied the traveler, with a grave air. "God alone can answer how all this will end. At all events, we have gained fifteen days. We must employ them well."

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES.

ALMOST a week had elapsed ; great changes had transpired at the Red House. That somber dwelling, formerly so lonely and inhospitable, had suddenly become a scene of parties and pleasure. Every day new troops of visitors congregated at Vonderspeight's, where all were welcomed with unheard-of favor, and sumptuously entertained. The report spread that its doors had been thrown open, and this circumstance undoubtedly contributed not a little to augment the zeal of those who thought they had a right to be admitted into that improvised Eldorado.

All this may have been principally because the Red House now contained an object of curiosity for the good people of the neighborhood. The Merys formerly had exercised great influence in the colony ; the unexpected return of Frank Mery was therefore the universal theme. His adventures, his dissipations, his tragic duel and his strange disappearance, were still fresh in memory. But what particularly attracted general attention was the immense fortune they said he had brought from the Indies ; he could measure gold, pearls and diamonds by the bushel. A vessel had landed at night in a cove near the Red House, from which had been landed, with great mystery, riches enough to purchase the freight of all the sea-craft in the port of New York, and the city itself in the bargain. In proof of the fact, they cited the representations of a custom-house officer, who had given chase to the aforesaid vessel, without being able to reach it, on the night of the last gale.

Mery did not bother himself to contradict these reports; he even appeared, by his prodigality, to take pleasure in confirming them. His first care, after having touched the hundred guineas required from Vonderspeight, had been to repair to the city and procure a rich eastern costume, which he wore with ease and majesty. Then, having learned the particulars connected with his numerous relationship, and those persons who had formerly been on friendly terms with his family, he went with great ceremony to visit them. His assurance, his conversation, his habits of opulence, and a few pieces of gold discreetly bestowed, had dazzled the community. It had welcomed with enthusiasm the advances of the Nabob; it had accepted his invitations without being pressed, and in this way the Red House was incessantly filled with the relatives and friends of our hero, who were magnificently entertained, with Vonderspeight's best.

To offset this splendid ostentation, certain rumors had also spread in the neighborhood. A New Yorker, who had disembarked from an English ship, on which Mery had arrived, declared that the soi disant Nabob had served on the vessel in the capacity of a common sailor, not having money to pay his passage. Gumpert, mine host of The Leopard, recounted to whoever would listen to him how Mery had arrived one evening at his inn in the most wretched outfit, and how impossible he had found it to pay his expenses. But, these reports were treated as absurdities, or rather, people would speak, with an arch smile, of the trials that all travelers becoming rich in foreign lands were in the habit of making on their return to their native country, in order to test their relatives and friends. Moreover, Mery acted as master at the Red House, and it was said, not without an appearance of justice, that the pernicious and insolent Vonderspeight would pitilessly have chased him from the house, if the traveler had not given some proof of his great wealth.

The fact is, Vonderspeight seemed totally eclipsed in his own house. Mery alone gave the orders; it was every day new expenses, that the old clerk was constrained to pay in silence, but with rage at heart. Yet, what afflicted Vonderspeight most in the new order of things, was seeing incessantly at the Red House, Oscar Flemyngh, who was now recognized as

Adele's suitor. Oscar, overwhelmed with joy at being able to be near her, was little disturbed or affected by the menacing gestures and the irritated looks which the old man could not restrain in his presence. Adele, more timid, was often alarmed, fearing that her persecutor might be meditating some sinister project to break through his powerful constraint; but Mery's powerful protection gave her courage. She partially knew by what means the Nabob exercised his influence over Vonderspeight; she was hoping that considerations of self-interest would suppress all other sentiments in the sordid soul of the old miser.

This, then, was the state of affairs when, during one magnificent afternoon, the ladies Marston and Oscar were seated under a bower at the end of the garden. A family from the city, whose head was a cousin of Mery's, of the sixth grade or thereabouts, was at this time at the Red House. As usual, a sumptuous dinner had been served to the visitors; but the ladies had withdrawn, as soon as etiquette would permit, leaving the guests to feast, at their ease, with their relative, Frank Mery. Oscar was not slow to follow them.

They were at one end of a delicious flower-path. The little shaded arbor, loaded with fruit and flowers, rose at the base of the steep rock by which Oscar had descended into the garden, on the night he rendered his great service to Frank Mery. The sun, already on its decline, was gilding the summit of the gray rocks and grand trees that surrounded the house. By an opening through the foliage, could be seen the blue waves of the Hudson, dotted with a few white sails. A fresh breeze, blowing from the sea, was trembling in the massive firs and elms. At intervals might be heard the merry laugh and joyous acclaim of the guests in the dining-room of the house.

Mrs. Marston had taken her position on a wooden bench, and was occupied with her needle. Adele was seated near her, while Oscar, leaning against the trunk of an old tree, was talking low to the young woman. That intimate conversation seemed to possess an equal charm to both, when Mrs. Marston, interrupting her work, observed suddenly in her dry and peevish tone,

"These privacies and warblings are all very well, my

dears ; but it can not continue long thus. It will be necessary to explain, in the end. Strange things are passing around us. It is enough to turn one's head ! Still, my daughter belongs to me, and I trust that no one will usurp the privilege of disposing of her without my permission."

At this moment a joyous voice made itself heard not far off, and Frank Mery appeared in an adjoining path. His rich costume, part Moorish, part Indian, was a little disordered ; his velvet cap, embroidered with gold, was jauntily posed on one side ; his physiognomy, always so pleasant and animated, despite his furrows and gray hairs, bore an expression of mock gayety. He was holding in one hand a glass of champagne, and in the other a biscuit, at which he nibbled as he walked.

" Faith ! My good friends," cried he, laughing, " why did you leave the table before the meal was over ? Egad ! You lost a funny sight ; first the menagerie of my relations, whom I made drunk by obliging to drink beyond measure to my happy return ; and then poor Vonderspeight, who made most piteous faces as he counted the empty bottles and broken glasses. The pauper ! But, by Al-Borak ! what does this mean ?" continued he, examining his auditors more attentively. " Miss Adele is weeping, and Oscar melancholy as a tomb-stone ! What has disturbed my children ? Who has been throwing stones into my rose-bush ? Egad ! Is this some new trick of old sly-boots Vonderspeight ? Is the old rascal already anxious to break the truce ?"

He quickly bore his hand to the precious shawl, which served as a girdle, as if to assure himself he might find there a weapon in case of need. He then scrutinized the lovers with an air of affectionate interest, whilst the latter bowed their heads in silence.

" Mr. Mery," at length said Oscar, sadly, " Vonderspeight is no longer the cause of the affliction in which you have found us. Thanks for your kindness ; but it can do nothing to diminish our actual regrets."

And the tears would come to his eyes.

" Then I must hold *you* to account, Mrs. Marston, it would appear," said Mery, lowering his brow. " You would still annoy my young friends with your eternal exigencies of

fortune and position! Have I not given you to understand that in a certain event—”

“ You have been good enough to tell me that, in any possible case, they should want nothing from you or any one; and, as I could no longer suffer this young man to hover about my daughter or whisper in her ear—”

Mery raised his finger, and shook it with earnestness.

“ Are you then so wicked?” asked he with warmth. “ Have you the heart to martyrize this young couple? Look at them! Does not their heavy sorrow move you? I thought my heart withered by twenty years of travel, struggles and disenchantment; but, in beholding, *I* feel ready to weep. This is because in scouring the world, in every sense, I have admired many things among the marvels of art and the splendors of nature, but have found nothing as worthy of respect and admiration as two young and happy lovers inspired by the impulses of a first love!”

Mrs. Marston looked with astonishment upon the strange man who was speaking thus.

“ Do not separate them,” continued he, growing still more animated. “ It would be a mistake; it would be a crime! Do not separate them, out of fear that their misery might recoil on your head. I loved as this young man once—a very long time ago. If no obstacle had been raised to that love, I might have become a simple and good man, useful to my fellow-men and obedient to the laws of society; but, I encountered an obstacle; my fiercest passions became irritated; I became mad, blind. Blood flowed, and a corpse was thrown between her and me. The existence of my unhappy love was crushed with a blow, and I, during half my life, have wandered, proscribed and a vagabond, over the surface of the earth, rarely doing good, often evil, at the expense of others, and even of myself!”

He had spoken with extreme vehemence; he raised his hand to his forehead, as if he might have wished to repress the beatings of his heart. When he withdrew his hand, after a moment of silence, the serenity of his expression was restored.

“ Dear Heaven pardon me!” resumed he, forcing a smile. “ I believe I am growing sentimental; it is undoubtedly

the presence of my young friends that has made me feel the truth of this mistake so uncommon at my age. But, come, Mrs. Marston ! Seriously, you do not think of separating them ? They love ; they are worthy of each other ; they will be happy. Oscar has rendered me a great service ; he has saved my life ; again, there is that about him—I can not define it—which pleases and attracts me. To see him attain the end of his desires, I would give—”

He suddenly paused and bit his lips.

“ Well ?” eagerly asked the sordid mother. “ You would give—”

“ The diamond of the Great Mogul—if I had it,” replied Mery, with calmness.

Mrs. Marston made a gesture of dissatisfaction.

“ Enough,” said she, resuming her work. “ I know what is left for me to do. It is always best to pay no attention to pretty speeches. Superb promises generally come to nothing ! I will not let myself be influenced by the humor of any one, but will act according to my own judgment.”

While she was speaking, or rather grumbling thus, a numerous company appeared at the end of the garden. The guests at the Red House, tired at the long absence of Frank Mery, were coming to reclaim him, under the leadership of Vonderspeight.

“ Good ! My dear cousins are impatient !” said the Nabob, gayly. “ On my word, I had almost forgotten them. See ! Father, mother, and children appear to have paid homage without measure to the Prime Minister of the vintage. The mother’s shawl is folded cross-wise, and papa can not walk straight. Vonderspeight himself, despite his scowling face, is not very strong in the knees ; unable to save his bottles, he has at least been willing to share their contents. Come ! Adele and Oscar, cheer up ! Away with this downcast air ! I promise you to arrange all. Mother Marston, we will talk it over when you are a little calmer, and you will become reasonable in the end. Meanwhile, laugh a little with me at my charming company ; it is really *very* diverting !”

He advanced to meet the approaching party, whom he welcomed with exaggerated expressions of respect and tenderness. Vonderspeight, escaping momentarily from the cares

of master of the house, wiped away the sweat that covered his forehead.

The guests were preparing to return to the city before night, and had come to take leave of the Nabob.

"How! Already?" said Mery, coolly. "You can only testify your friendship by remaining here several days, in order that I may entertain you in a manner more worthy of you and myself. We have really only commenced to enjoy ourselves."

A vivid anxiety betrayed itself in the features of Vonderspeight; happily, the head of the family, a small city merchant, excused himself, on account of his preoccupations, for refusing the invitation of his excellent cousin.

"Then you will finish your visit some other day; I am going to put the poor house to rights; we require a dozen servants and cooks of different nations. You will see, cousin, when you come again, that I can make a dinner after the Chinese; you shall taste shark-fin soups and swallow's-nest stews, and touch your lips with the precious sakki. I wager a thousand pounds that the ladies will declare these viands delicious. If you really can not stay over till to-morrow, I shall see you again next Sabbath, my good friends. We shall have a great reunion here on that day. Have the goodness to transmit my invitation to the Randalls, to the Devereaux, to the Davises, and to the rest, whose names I have forgotten, but whom I cherish from the bottom of my heart; tell them to come with their friends and acquaintances, their servants and their dogs, if they will. In India, it is the custom to visit a friend in caravan."

The guests bowed in token of assent, promising immediately to transmit the invitation. Vonderspeight, on hearing that frightful enumeration of guests and entertainments, could not refrain from a gesture of despair. Mery perceived it.

"I intend," said he, haughtily, and looking fixedly at the old man, "that nothing shall be spared for that occasion, when I wish to bring together all those whom I love. You will give your orders, Vonderspeight, and take care to have it a magnificent success. If there is not a large enough hall at the Red House, the banquet will take place in the garden; and then, I wish an abundance of flowers, of perfumes, and of music."

Mery threw his glance slyly at the ladies Marston and at Oscar, who were silent witnesses of the scene. He seemed to be considerably amused, although he preserved his imperturbable phlegm. As for Vonderspeight, red with anger and humiliation, he lowered his head, stammering forth a few excuses. At this moment, Jerry approached and handed him a letter which had just arrived. Vonderspeight seized it hurriedly, and moved a little to one side to read it. The servant, before retiring, announced to the guests that their carriages were waiting to carry them to the city.

"Do you hear, cousin?" observed one of the ladies, with indignation, (whether feigned or real we can not say,) approaching Frank Mery. "Master and servant both appear not to want us here; we undoubtedly annoy them. Let me tell you, cousin, you should have your best friends around you; put on an indignant expression, and these unwelcome guests will fly," (and she designated by a movement of the shoulders the ladies Marston and Oscar, who were at a short distance.) "Yes, they are already seeking to forestall you; there are some people *so* interested! But, you must reflect. These strangers are in no way related to you. If you would only come and put up with us in the city—"

"Mercy, Mrs. Jones," interrupted the husband, "our house will never be suitable for receiving such a guest as cousin Mery."

"Respect, friendship, and devotion might supply what is wanting in other respects, Mr. Jones," rejoined the lady, proudly. "I know what I know, and I pray cousin Frank to reflect on my proposition. Meanwhile, he can dispose of us, of our fortune, of our credit—everything; all we possess is his."

"Of what are you thinking, Mrs. Jones, when you offer cousin Mery our poor fare? This would be equivalent to throwing a drop of water into the sea."

For a response, the lady gratified her husband by poking her elbow into his ribs, murmuring,

"Fool!"

Mery had received at the hands of another servant, recently attached by him to the service of the Red House, a long Turkish pipe, with an amber mouth-piece, which he was smoking majestically; nevertheless, with one corner of his eye he was

observing old Vonderspeight, still absorbed in reading his letter at some distance.

"Mrs. Jones, and you, cousin Jones," said he, discharging a puff which ascended toward heaven, "I appreciate your disinterestedness and your friendship to their full extent. I have not visited all quarters of the globe without having learned considerable of men, and perhaps, also, a little of the women. Be assured, then, that in due time I shall recall your offers."

"Accept them immediately, Mr. Mery," said Vonderspeight, his countenance beaming with joy, pushing toward him his letter. "Accept them forthwith, and relieve me of your presence!"

At that brutal apostrophe, those present made a movement of surprise and indignation. Mery alone remained motionless. Removing from his mouth the amber end of his pipe, he calmly looked at the old clerk.

"What means this language?" demanded Oscar. "Have you forgotten, Mr. Vonderspeight?"

"I have forgotten nothing," said Vonderspeight, with insolent gayety; "but I have been a coward to be baffled in my own house, and I am going to sweep out every thing that disturbs me. Thus then the nabob, and the Jones, and the cunning lovers, and the new servants, and Chinese dinners, and all your infernal trumpery are going, at last, to decamp. Go, that my house may promptly be cleared, for, verily, rage chokes me and I do not know how to contain myself any longer!"

Every one remained motionless; no one could believe the order was serious.

"Soho! the man is mad," said Mrs. Jones, with a disdainful air, "to speak thus to a gentleman rich enough to purchase the whole island!"

"Let him purchase, then, a lodging for to-night; for I swear it, he shall not sleep again at the Red House."

"It is easy for you to know your friends, now," said Mrs. Jones, addressing herself to Mery. "You see in whom you have reposed confidence. Come with me to the city, dear cousin; come and get into our carriage; you can bring with you also a box or two of your most precious effects; it would

be imprudent to leave your fortune at the mercy of that miserable person."

"His baggage will not be heavy," said Vonderspeight, grinning. "He has nothing in the world. The clothes he has on his body were purchased with the money he forced me to give him."

"These sumptuous dinners, these outlays—"

"I have suffered every thing, paid all the scores. I, a man reputed shrewd and experienced, have allowed myself to be duped like a school-boy, a woman. Oh! but it is once, and the lesson may serve me. Come! Leave my house instantly."

"I will not remain here a minute longer," said Mrs. Jones, with indignation; "we did not come to this place to be insulted."

"This is infamous!" added Mr. Jones. "Let us go, my wife, my children; I never before believed I should live long enough to see myself chased thus from the house of a relative."

"It is a shame!"

"An outrage!"

And the family fled toward the house, and ere long were in their carriage, on their road to New York.

The abuse of Vonderspeight and the precipitate departure of the Joneses had not altered for an instant the coolness of Mery, who observed, at length, with a smile.

"From what I see, Master Vonderspeight, I guess you know, at length—"

"I know the truth," interrupted the old clerk, with an accent of triumph. "That paper, which you obstinately refuse to show me, is not in your hands. Your hesitation and obstinacy excited my suspicions. Wishing to clear them up, I wrote to the successor of the attorney with whom you entrusted the defeasance. This is his response: 'That important document must have been sent some time since to its address, for it is not mentioned on the office register; but as it has never been used, there is every reason to believe it was destroyed or lost.'"

"This is the response I myself obtained," replied Mery, sadly. "Dear and unhappy Madeline would take nothing from her

brother's murderer. If that paper really fell into her hands, she must have destroyed without reading it."

"If you knew these facts, what then did you expect from me?" exclaimed Vonderspeight. "Why defend yourself with so much earnestness on the night of your arrival here, since nothing could be found on you? And since then, why these follies unworthy of a man of your age, these extravagant outlays, this unheard-of waste?"

Mery looked at him with a contemptuous air; then he broke into a loud laugh.

"I wished to amuse myself at your expense, Vonderspeight, and at the expense of besotted and vile creatures such as you—I would still have my bill footed from the inheritance of which you robbed me."

The old clerk became red with indignation.

"Be cautious in your expressions, sir," said he arrogantly. "I am an honest man, sir, and I will not suffer any one to insult me. If you have any rights, make them known; but," continued he, dryly, "all these words are useless; I am going to call Jerry, and drive you—"

"Miserable knave!" cried Mery, taking a step to seize him by the throat.

The ladies uttered a cry of alarm, whilst Vonderspeight, pale and trembling recoiled a step. But almost immediately the *ci devant* East Indian resumed his calm attitude.

"Bah!" said he, shrugging his shoulders. "A rascal the less on earth, where there are already so many, would not be appreciable. Come, young man," continued he, turning toward Oscar; "the only thing left to us is to beat a retreat, for we have been included in that polite invitation to leave this place."

"Yes!" cried Vonderspeight. "He—he before all!"

"I have no intention of remaining at Mr. Vonderspeight's," said Oscar, with dignity; "but, before departing, I would wish to know if it is without restraint that Mrs. and Miss Marston—"

"Oscar, I can not, I must not, remain here the object of the snares and odious projects of that man!" cried Adele, with a prayerful voice. "Gentlemen, I conjure you, do not leave me in that horrible house."

" You are controlled by your mother, miss," rudely interrupted Vonderspeight. " And if my good friend, Mrs. Marston," continued he softly, addressing himself to the widow, " has preserved for me a trifle of her former regard—"

Mrs. Marston regarded him with an affectation of emotion.

" I really believe that they improperly calumniated you, my old friend," responded she. " If I had better understood the explanations that have just taken place in my presence, you would never once have ceased to appear to merit my esteem and consideration."

" Well, if such is your view, my good lady, my house will continue for your daughter and yourself a safe asylum; you would certainly be unwilling to confide the fate of Adele, or your own, to such vagabonds as yonder two scapegraces without a farthing."

" Mother," cried Adele, " you do not understand the shameful rôle—"

" Peace, miss; do you pretend to be wiser than I, your mother, to whom you owe obedience and respect? I announce to these gentlemen, therefore," continued she, peremptorily, " that we do not require their aid. What they had better do is to obey the orders of Mr. Vonderspeight."

Adele uttered a heart-rending cry; Oscar answered that nothing in the world should prevent his protecting Adele, if she would accept his protection. He would have addressed a last entreaty to Mrs. Marston; but Mery sadly observed,

" You should be resigned, my poor boy; you will obtain nothing from that woman, in whom intelligence and heart are equally wanting. We have no means of preventing this cruel separation. Only, let this old rascal," continued he, with a threatening gesture, turning towards Vonderspeight, " take good care not to employ any violence towards that young lady. *I* will watch him, and if he should be guilty of a harsh act, I will address myself to justice for—"

" Pshaw! I no longer fear you," cried the old man with assurance. " Circumstances have changed. Would any one believe that I, a rich and honored citizen, could intend any ill towards an unfortunate person, who, without home or friends, came to seek hospitality here? The existence of

that paper might, perhaps, have given some shadow of authority to that assertion ; but it does not exist, and I will prove that it never existed. Again, who are you to inspire confidence ? A ruined adventurer, who, having disappeared after a tragic duel, now returns to his native country, like the prodigal son, with a detestable notoriety clinging to his name, and poverty-stricken owing to his own misconduct. And, who is this young man here with him ? A poor clerk, who introduced himself here at night by stealth, in an occupied house. The idea of these accusers obtaining the condemnation of such a man as I ! You would perhaps also accuse me of smuggling ? Very good ! You can come here or into any other place belonging to me to prosecute your searches ; if you find an invoice, a bundle of merchandise, or a word in my handwriting to sustain the accusation—. Believe me, I have used precaution ; I can, at length, brave your wrath. But this is enough, and since you do not wish to leave my house of your own free will, I know well how to require you."

At the same time he called Jerry, who hastened immediately to his master's side.

Seeing that they were disposed to employ force against him, Mery became pale with rage.

" Bless my soul ! Egad ! *Corpo di Bacco !*" cried he, irritated. " Do you imagine, then, old scoundrel, that I would thus allow myself to be thrown out by the shoulders from the house that belongs to me, and where I was born ? You must do me the honors to the end, knave, and this brave young man, also ; yes, you will accompany us to the gate, hat in hand, and as politely as if we were noblemen, or true nabobs."

And he drew from his girdle a pistol.

" Sir," stammered Vonderspeight, " I will never consent to—"

" Hat off, numbskull, and walk at our side with deference and respect ; or, if not, I swear that I will break your head as I would break an old pie-plate ! "

The sound of his voice and his look denoted that he might be capable of accomplishing the threat. Vonderspeight was not the man to risk his life in resisting the singular claims of

this original character. He assented, therefore, to the great astonishment of Jerry, who remained in the same place, his arms transfixed to his side, and his mouth wide open.

Mery took Oscar's arm, while the latter sighed, as Mrs. Marston intercepted him from parting with Adele. Then, with his long Turkish pipe in one hand, and his pistol in the other, with all the majesty evoked by his ample and rich oriental costume, the Nabob advanced towards the house. Vonderspeight, hat in hand, preceded, following the severity of the required ceremonial.

When they reached the gate, he saluted them profoundly and retreated, constantly in dread of hearing whistle past his ears, the bullet from the pistol of his fantastic enemy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOUBLE DISCOVERY.

ON leaving the Red House, the two friends repaired to The Leopard. Mery's arrival in his embroidered habit and strange outfit put every thing in confusion in the poor house; Chris and his better-half indulged in expressions of admiration, while the children with which the dwelling was infested, mounted on the wooden benches to catch a glimpse of the celebrated Nabob. But when Mery announced that he calculated remaining at the inn for several days, suspicion became mingled with the inn-keeper's delight.

"Ah!" said he. "This is a special favor of Providence! This man who stirs up guineas with a shovel, come to dwell with me! It is well, Mr. Mery, that you felt no ill-will; you have forgiven me, then, that cursed bottle of Rhine wine you drank the night of your arrival? Why, the deuce did you wear that ragged habit? No one could have guessed; it will not happen again. Come! Every thing here is at your service. Still, aside from curiosity, it is strange that you left the Red House to come here?"

"Hush, Chris!" interrupted his wife. "When one has the

wherewith, and would live well, he can not rest comfortably at neighbor Vonderspeight's; without meaning to say any thing against him, he is a little *close*, poor man. Mr. Mery will be much better entertained here, and, if, he loves game, as all true gentlemen do, I can promise him the best. He can ask Mr. Flemynghow Mr. Gumpert prepares game."

The Nabob paid very little attention to this harangue. He threw himself on a bench, and sought to console Oscar. But the curious landlord was not so easily discouraged. He felt that some extraordinary event must have occurred to decide Mery to take lodgings in that obscure tavern.

"It is always the same manner with him," repeated Chris, defiantly shaking his head. "A merchant who has so many ships on the sea—"

"Well! my ships have been wrecked," interrupted Mery, impatiently.

"Could it be possible! And those tons of gold heaped up in the garret of the Red House?"

"They have melted away like dew in the sunlight," replied Mery, coolly. "But, I see, mine host, you fear that I can not yet pay my score; is it not so? Happily, a few pieces of coin more reliable than the rest have not disappeared with the general cargo. Hold! I will pay you in advance. Prepare me a chamber; give me something to eat and drink, and leave us in peace; for, wherever they may be, I detest the curious and the talkative."

And he tossed a guinea on the table.

The inn-keeper grimaced a smile, bowed to the ground, and asked no further questions.

The two friends occupied the same apartment, and for a good reason, that being the only one in the house at the service of temporary guests. The following morning, at daybreak, they had already arisen, and were discussing what measures to take under these perplexing circumstances. Oscar, seated near the window, looking beyond the trees upon the Hudson, was resting, mournful and pensive, his head in his hands, while Mery was walking with a measured step as he smoked his Turkish pipe, which had been saved from the wreck of his ephemeral opulence.

"Why was I ever made to conceive such sweet hopes?"

said the lover, sadly. "At seeing your influence, your authority over Vonderspeight, I thought you sure to prevail in your desires, when suddenly our projects were ruined, defeated, destroyed."

Mery deposited his pipe on the table, and advanced toward the young man ; taking his hand, with cordiality, he said,

"I owe you an explanation. I do not wish you to address me, even in your thoughts, the least reproach. You recollect yourself, my boy, that I never gave you any *positive* assurance of overcoming the obstacles to be encountered to your union with Miss Marston. I was, myself, too uncertain of the success of my audacity to do *that*. In my way to the Red House I refused to take charge of your letter to Adele ; it was repugnant to my feelings to undertake an engagement I might not be able to fulfill. Since then, without wishing to reveal my secret, I have always let you suspect how precarious was the nature of my credit with old Vonderspeight. Tell me : is not what I have said the exact truth ?"

"I know it ; I know it ! But, on seeing you impose your caprices on our enemy, ordering him in his own house, humiliating him at every turn—"

"You thought my conduct mad, absurd ; am I not right ? You would ask me to what purpose, having no legal means of obliging a man of bad faith to make restitution, I came to stop at his house, to vex him and torment him in a thousand ways, at the risk of being shamefully driven out when the ruse should be discovered, as it has precisely happened. In the first place, on returning to my native country, without means, without friends, without resources, I resolved to ascertain if honor and probity might not exercise some influence with the man to whom I had formerly confided my fortune ; on discovering my mistake, I could not resist the desire to avenge myself pleasantly at the expense of my faithless depository. But, I *had* other reasons for acting as I have acted. I relied, by my imperturbable assurance, on frightening Vonderspeight and bringing about a compromise, the principal condition of which would have been your alliance to Miss Marston. These extravagant dinners, these continual receptions of relatives and friends, had for their purpose only to involve in expense the robber of my estate ; I desired by this

means to put myself in communication with influential persons, and thus prevent Vonderspeight's trying to insnare them into taking part against me in my last extremity. You perceive, my boy, that my plan was not altogether void of common sense. Certainly it might have succeeded, if the suspicious Vonderspeight had not conceived the idea of ascertaining the real existence of the defeasance. I had already sounded him on the subject of the compromise of which I have spoken, and he eagerly seized the idea. To acquire his security and disembarrass himself of me, he would have accepted part of my effects. A premature revelation came to spoil all!"

"I do not accuse you, Mery," replied Oscar, sadly, shaking the hand of the ex-Nabob. "I have already appreciated the solid qualities you conceal under a frivolous exterior. No; I can not complain of you, for I owe you several happy days passed at the side of poor Adele."

"Courage, then," said Mery, in a friendly tone. "You must not yet put things in their worst light. We no longer live in a time when one can force a girl to marry whom she does not want. Adele will hold out, and her weak mother will end by opening her eyes."

Oscar shook his head doubtfully, and Mery had not the strength to persist in representations in which he did not himself believe. There followed an interval of silence.

"Well! and you, sir?" at length inquired Oscar, with an effort. "You have not yet told what are your projects, if my affection for you can give me the right—"

"Me!" said Mery, resuming his joyous and railing tone. "And what is left for me to do if not to embark as a sailor on the first vessel leaving the port of New York? Or, perhaps, it would be better to advertise myself as an object of curiosity in some street show; all the idlers would flock to see the famous Nabob of the Red House! I might, perchance, amass a small fortune. Faith, Oscar, I would willingly choose this last part, if it would give me the means of living near the old home, and with you. I do not know how it has happened; but no one in the five parts of the earth has inspired me with the regard I entertain for you. By Mahomet! my boy, you have thrown a spell over me."

"And I, Mery," said the young man, earnestly, "from the first, without knowing you, felt myself drawn toward you; it would be painful to part with you now, for you are my only friend. But before carrying out your extreme resolution, can you not think how you might force that miserable Vonderspeight—"

"Unfortunately, I can do nothing without that defeasance, so fatally lost. That alone might give me the power to reclaim my usurped fortune. Moreover, to litigate anywhere money is necessary, and I have, at the most, but twenty guineas left; these twenty guineas, added to two or three others that I might perhaps obtain for my Nabob suit, constitute a poor enough sum; the smallest pettifogger would not accept it as a retainer."

"But you have rich relations; they loaded you with attentions at the Red House?"

"Who, indeed? The Joneses, the Randalls, or whatever may be their satanic names? Their sincerity is about as deep as the coat or the skin to their back! Would you be simple enough, artless enough, my boy, to believe in these protestations? These good relatives would not give me a shilling, a penny, a farthing, knowing me to be ruined. I have not for an instant been their dupe, and they would have understood it well, had they not been blind. It would be time lost, even to put them to the test."

"Oh!" said Oscar, lifting his eyes towards heaven. "All who touch my heart, all whom I love are doomed to suffer!"

He had scarcely uttered these words, when Gumpert was heard at the lower landing, talking very earnestly; then, a few light but hurried steps made the old staircase creak, the door suddenly opened, and Adele Marston, her head and shoulders covered by a light shawl, darted into the chamber.

Oscar uttered a cry of surprise, and received into his arms the trembling girl, pale as a ghost, and out of breath.

"Save me, save me!" said she, in a choked voice.

"You, Adele, my dear Adele? But whence come you? How come you here? What has happened, then?"

She could not speak.

"Seat yourself, my child," said Mery, kindly. "Some new infamy, undoubtedly, of Vonderspeight's?"

"Shut the door," murmured Adele, eagerly. "They will pursue me, certainly. A few persons met me on the road; I was running like a madwoman. You will take care of me when they come, will you not? You will defend me?"

"Fear nothing, Adele; you have friends here, ready to sacrifice for you their existence, if it should become necessary."

"And to one of them," murmured Mery, shrugging his shoulders, "the sacrifice would not be very great."

The young woman breathed a moment, after which she resumed, in a calmer tone,

"Oscar, Mr. Mery, what will you think of me? Alas! What I have done is wrong—very wrong, I know—I have left my mother, and come to seek you here; but my excuse is in the height of my despair; my poor head is turned; without reflecting I have come to take refuge with the only friends I have in the world!"

Oscar, with the tenderest and most passionate expressions, endeavored to reassure her.

"But, really, what is the cause of your grief and fright, my poor child?" asked Mery, softly.

"I am going to tell you. Yesterday evening, after your departure from the Red House, I had to undergo a long lecture from Vonderspeight, in the presence of my mother; then he spoke of pardon and reconciliation. He made me the most brilliant promises if I would consent to marry him. He vaunted his immense wealth; I resisted all his offers. Then he threatened and excited against me my poor mother, whose feeble mind could not resist the cruel ascendancy of that dangerous man. After a horrible scene, in which I submitted to the most frightful tortures, I repaired to my chamber, leaving my mother with him. They passed a portion of the night in conversation; my mother rejoined me very late. I had expected to be again beset by her, but she said nothing to me. This morning, on rising, I learned that Vonderspeight had departed very early for the city; Jerry had received from his master a pressing mission, and had also left home. Their absence surprised me, but without awaking my suspicions. At breakfast, my mother roughly announced to me that I must prepare myself, this very evening, to depart with her for I knew not where. I asked her why this sudden

journey and what its destination. She at first refused to give me any explanation, merely responding that I must obey without replying. Yet, by force of pressing questions, I drew from her the truth, almost in spite of herself. I learned, then, that we must embark to-night on a vessel belonging to Vonderspeight, and sail for some port in the South ; there, said mother, since I was so obstinate and so ignorant of my interests, they could oblige me to marry my benefactor. For the execution of this plan, Vonderspeight was going to the city to obtain the necessary papers, and had sent Jerry to carry his orders to the captain of this craft now at anchor in the river. You can realize with what shame I learned of this abominable design."

"Ay, ay," said Mery, thoughtfully, "I see through all the plans of the old rascal. As such a marriage could not be possible or enforceable here, he has, undoubtedly, calculated on abusing the narrow intelligence of your mother by a suppositious marriage ; again, when he would once hold you on a vessel of his own, filled with miserable smugglers obedient to his orders—. A thousand devils ! One would willingly expose himself to any risk for the sake of running through such an arrant knave."

"And you have fled to thwart this monstrous plan ?" cried Oscar, with warmth. "Oh ! thanks, Adele ; thanks for that act of courage !"

"I first supplicated mother ; I sought to make her comprehend the absurdity of this project, to make her fathom the snares it might conceal. She would not listen to me ; she rudely ordered me to remain silent, and left me alone. There was no one at the Red House but my mother and the woman in charge, for Vonderspeight last evening sent away Mr. Mery's two servants. The occasion was favorable ; I glided stealthily into the yard and opened the gate ; sure of finding you at the inn, I ran to seek your aid and protection."

And her tears again commenced to flow.

"This is very well, my poor child," said Mery, uneasily ; "but, if you knew where we were, Vonderspeight and your mother must also know. It would not be difficult for them to find us ; they will come here, and as the authority of a mother is all-powerful over a minor child—"

"What then, Mr. Mery!" interrupted Oscar. "Can we not carry Adele to New York, and conceal her in a safe house? The city is large and populous; it would be easy to find for Miss Marston a retreat where no one could discover her."

"Yes; and as Miss Marston has been seen in our company, we should be arrested within twenty-four hours, charged with having kidnapped a minor. Believe me, we must not allow ourselves to be outdone by the cunning of old Vönder-speight."

"Such considerations will not deter me!" impetuously cried Oscar. "And if Adele will consent—"

"They would no more deter me," responded Mery, "if my safety alone was concerned. But, frankly, young man, I would with regret behold you and this young lady disgraced by a step which might give the appearance of an impropriety to a love heretofore pure and honest. Take care, my young friends; in thus protesting and revolting against society and maternal authority, do you know where you may be led?"

His eyes became moist as he spoke.

"Yet, sir," said Oscar, timidly, "circumstances are so imperious."

"Circumstances should not justify an impropriety," replied Mery, softly. "Believe a man who is unaccustomed to exaggerate scruples. Do not attack established rights; some day, you will bitterly regret not having yielded to their pitiless authority."

Adele lowered her head, blushing. Oscar had already remarked the propensity of Mery to indulge in sarcasm, and had more than once been constrained to observe his apparent disregard of principle. Not understanding, or being able to reconcile that excess of caution, he looked at the speaker with some surprise.

"Oscar," he resumed, smiling sadly, "I would, perhaps, gain much in your esteem if we better understood each other. I have committed many errors, but in the midst of my wildness, I have always revered what is truly respectable. I have been severe with you, because I do not wish to see you make a mistake similar to that by which I myself was lost—because I would not see this charming young woman made wretched

as was my poor Madeline, by outraging the usages of society."

"Madeline!" repeated Oscar, trembling.

"Ay; that was the name of the beautiful and sweet woman I loved and wed. If you had been from this neighborhood, Oscar, you would certainly know, despite your youth, the tragic history of my unfortunate Madeline Hall."

Oscar hurriedly rose; his eyes gleamed, and his face was white as a sheet.

"Of whom do you speak, sir?" stammered he. "What name have you pronounced? I could not have heard aright! No! It is impossible that—"

"Did you know it?" interrupted Mery, impetuously. "The unfortunate drama in which she was concerned, was formerly too general a theme in the entire island to allow the name of my sad victim to escape."

"Hush, sir!"

"Why, in heaven's name?"

"You insult the memory of my mother!"

An eloquent silence followed that revelation. Adele, forgetting her own troubles, dared not breathe, while Oscar remained motionless, his eyes lowered. As for Mery, no one could follow the changes wrought in his features. His complexion, browned by a tropical sun, had assumed a livid tint; his heart was oppressed, and a convulsive trembling shook his powerful frame.

He suddenly darted towards Oscar, and seized his arm.

"Your age?" said he, in an almost unintelligible voice. "In pity's name, tell me your age!"

"Sir—"

"Ay, Oscar! You must; I wish to know! I pray—"

"I was born the 8th of June, 17—."

"In the month of June!" replied Mery, raising his head to his forehead, "and I myself embarked in the month of April—no, in the month of May. Oh, dear heaven! restore my memory! When I left my wife, my Madeline, it was already decreed she would soon become a mother. Oscar, Oscar," cried he, with emotion, opening his arms, "you are my—"

"I am the son of Mr. Flemyngh, sir."

"That is true; that is true!" replied Mery, plunged into

inexpressible perplexity. "But, let us see! Reflect a little; let us review these strange circumstances. Assist me, Oscar, my—my friend! My head is turned; I shall go mad! Yes; it begins to clear up. You say your mother often wept in looking at you; your presence at times inspired her with a sort of fright. This was the effect of her horrible reminiscences! Then your father on all occasions displayed his hatred; he did not treat you like his other children; after the death of your mother, he separated from you and refused to see you. Is it not so? Say! Is it not so?"

Oscar did not answer. Mery continued:

"But, why did she take refuge at ——? Why was she not recognized? Why did she marry again so soon? Oscar, your mother must often have spoken to you of her family, of her past; she must have revealed to you certain particulars in the matter of your birth; she must have—"

"She never spoke of her parents or connexion," replied Oscar. "She never made allusion to her youth, to her position in the world before her marriage; it was only after I had reached maturity, that I, her son, learned her family name. As to special confidences, I never received from her but one—at the moment of her death."

"That is the time when truth escapes the most secretive hearts. Well, Oscar, tell me—"

"She summoned me to her chamber, where we were left alone; she kissed me and wept. Then she asked pardon for having been often cold and unjust towards me. At length, drawing from behind her pillow a sealed packet, which she handed me, she said with an almost extinct voice, 'My son, when I shall no longer be, you will find in these papers the secret of my conduct towards you; I have no right to conceal from you those affairs which concern you. Yet, if you have any affection for your unhappy mother, you will not seek to know her errors and remorse.' I took the packet, and have preserved it with care. Faithful to her sacred recommendation, I have never opened it."

"But where is this packet, Oscar? You have not lost this precious packet?"

The young man directed his steps towards a valise containing his effects, and took therefrom a large envelope, sealed with several seals, like a testament.

"Give it to me!" cried Mery, eagerly.

"Hold!" cried Oscar, with a choked voice, turning his eyes. "I believe you have a right to know the secret of my poor mother."

Mery seized the packet with a trembling hand. He tore open the envelope and threw an anxious look over the papers it contained. The tears rushed to his eyes.

"There is no more doubt!" cried he, with inexpressible grief. "Here is the deed signed by Vonderspeight. Here is the power of attorney by which I abandoned to unfortunate Madeline, or to the child to which she would give birth, the revenue from my estate. Out of shame for the murder of her brother by my hand, Madeline did not wish to make use of these important documents. Here, finally, is the narrative of the sad events of her life, our sad love and secret marriage, my duel with her brother, her subsequent flight to —, her marriage, on receiving a report of my having been shipwrecked, with an obscure man to whom her family had once rendered a service, and who wished to save her from starvation; her scruples, her terrors—all are there written in a few lines in her own hand. Oscar, Oscar, do you believe me now?"

"Father!" cried the young man.

They fell each into the arms of the other; they wept; they looked at one another; then they again embraced.

"My son!" said Mery, pressing Oscar to his bosom. "I have a son; I, the adventurer, the man without a name; I, the pariah of the five parts of the world! Oh! If I had known what happiness was reserved for me, how I would have fled the danger, how cowardly I would have been! But, nothing revealed to me your existence. Once, in Africa, I encountered a sea-captain whom I knew in New York; he told me of the disappearance of Madeline; he informed me, following the common impression, that she had died in obscurity. I believed the sad tale, and no longer hoped to be a father. Then I courted peril with a sort of fury, exposed myself to danger and embarked in the most reckless enterprises; sometimes rich, at others poor. I scoured the earth, finding myself everywhere without aim, without hope, without desires. And during all this time I had a son! And he is

beautiful, and good, and generous! He loves me! He saved my life before he knew me. Oh! This is too much! I do not merit this happiness. I, who caused all the misfortunes of my poor, wretched Madeline!"

"She forgave you, father, for her heart was full of kindness and clemency. We will talk of her often. And you, father, with care and affection, will come to forget your past sorrows we will no longer be separated."

"I leave you, Oscar, my child? That would be impossible. But, even in the midst of my joy," continued he, with a somber tone, "I still feel remorse for my past errors, which are condemned in the eyes of the world."

"What matter the world and its conventionalities?" exclaimed Oscar, with warmth. "My affection is undaunted."

And he threw himself again into his father's arms. Adele timidly drew near.

"And I, Oscar! And I, Mr. Mery!" said she, smiling through her tears. "May I not share your joy?"

"You, my pretty child! You, twin pearl of my casket!" responded Mery, carried away by his feelings. "You will share our happiness in completing it; you shall be my daughter as he is my son. I will take you both under my wing and defend you from beak and talons as the hen defends its young brood. Heavens! My head is distracted. Behold my brood at last sheltered! I laugh and weep in the same breath. She is so beautiful, so gentle and so graceful—my daughter! And then, my son is so brave, so honest, so devoted! You will love one another and you will love me. You will call me father; is it not so? And later, your children—. But what am I saying? Pay no attention! Do not listen to me! I am delirious, wild, and you do not want for a father the ridiculous fool, whom they formerly nicknamed Rattlepate!"

He threw himself on a seat, where the tears came in abundance to solace his speech, for he was suffocating. The young man and woman approached him. Each of them took one of his hands and pressed it in silence, thus giving the poor Nabob time to calm himself.

"Father," at length resumed Oscar, sadly, "why can not this happiness of which you speak ever be realized?"

"What!" responded Mery, hurriedly raising his head.

"You forget, then—"

"Adele shall be your wife; do you understand? Yes, she shall be your wife, should I myself be compelled to wring the neck of that old rascal, Vonderspeight. But, you do not know then, Oscar, that the precious defeasance, of which your mother, owing to excess of delicacy, would not make use, is at last in our possession! Vonderspeight is going to lose his property! That document, drawn up by a skillful lawyer, has furnished me redoubtable arms against our persecutor. I distrusted even in confiding with him my fortune. I imposed on him very vigorous conditions, to which he was obliged to submit. To day I can reclaim all my property, capital and income, without any other delay than the time required to make known the signature. Oh! My rights are clear and terrible. Vonderspeight knew it well when he trembled in my presence; this time he shall have reason to tremble, for I will be inexorable!"

"Sir," replied Adele, embarrassed, "my mother's prejudice against Oscar—"

"Your mother? Poor child! I would not attempt to change your indulgent affection for her; but, let me assure you, her prejudices will not hold out when she beholds Oscar immensely rich and Vonderspeight ruined. I shall be able to obtain the consent of Mrs. Marston."

"May God aid you, father!" cried Oscar.

Adele turned suddenly pale.

"Well, sir!" said she, with a choked voice, pointing to the window that overlooked the highway, "if you have any influence over Mr. Vonderspeight and my mother, hasten to exercise it and protect me against their anger, for here they are."

In short, Vonderspeight and Mrs. Marston, covered with dust and out of breath, at this moment entered the inn, followed by Jerry. They soon heard their voices resounding in the hall below, mingled with those of Gumpert and his better-half. Adele trembled with alarm.

"Fly, Adele! Fly!" murmured Oscar, equally frightened.

"You can escape by the gate, and—"

"Stay, my child," said Mery.

The staircase was already groaning under hurried steps. Oscar seized one of Mery's pistols.

"I will defend her to the death!" exclaimed he, placing himself before the young woman. "If that old villain should dare to raise his hand—"

Mery snatched away the murderous weapon.

"What are you thinking of, Oscar?" said he, with authority. "Be calm, and let me act. Alone, henceforth, I wish to be charged with your interests."

The door opened violently, and Mrs. Marston and Vonderspeight entered the apartment. Their countenances were inflamed with anger. Behind them, on the first steps of the stairs, were Jerry and Gumpert, whom they had brought with them by way of precaution.

On perceiving the young woman, Vonderspeight could not suppress a cry of triumph.

"Ah! Ah!" said he, sneeringly. "Here, then, at length, is the beautiful fugitive princess, who comes to procure the assistance of these valiant knight-errants."

"Silence, sir!" interrupted Oscar, authoritatively. "You must not raise your voice here; you have no authority over that young lady. Spare, then, your abuse and threats."

Vonderspeight, surprised, remained silent.

"With me," said Mrs. Marston, tartly, "I hope no one will contest the right of treating this mad creature as she deserves? Come, unnatural child," added she, seizing poor Adele by the arm, "you have almost frightened me to death! Why leave your mother and a respectable home to take refuge in a tavern with—"

"Madam," interrupted Mery, with imposing severity, "if Miss Adele has taken a reprehensible step, the fault is not hers, but yours. When a blind mother, instead of protecting her daughter, leaves her exposed to outrage and the insults of a villain, it becomes quite necessary for the poor child to defend herself. But your right is sacred, madam; take back your daughter. No one will dare to detain her by force. Still, let me say, happily for her, she has other defenders more zealous and more watchful, who will watch over her safety."

Mrs. Marston submitted, without replying, to that just reproof; perhaps some secret remorse told her that these reproaches were merited.

Yet Vonderspeight, after a moment, had recovered his assurance.

"Come!" said he, in a railing tone. "These gentlemen, I think, are beginning to mix water with their wine; they undoubtedly understand the folly of resistance."

"We are moderate because we are strong," said Mery, gravely, "and if you have any doubt, Vonderspeight, look!"

At the same time, he took, with one hand, the defeasance

from his bosom, and extended the other hand to prevent the old man's touching it.

Vonderspeight attached a fixed stare on the fatal paper, and became frightfully pale; he would have approached.

"Do not stir! Do not move, on your life!" thundered Mery. "At this distance, you can already recognize your signature. You know what *that* means. You have been inflexible towards others and I will be inflexible with you. Before twenty-four hours shall have passed, you will render your accounts!"

Vonderspeight was stupefied; yet he essayed to stammer,

"That writing is false; it was fabricated by you!"

"You may say that to the lawyer to whom I am going to entrust it, with the order to use it immediately," replied Mery, gravely. "Now you can go; I will not detain you; we shall soon meet again."

Mrs. Marston listened attentively to that rapid conversation.

"What is the matter, friend?" inquired she of Vonderspeight; "what is that paper you dread so much?"

"You will soon learn, madam," said Mery, with firmness; "it is an act by which the magnificent estate of my family—every thing heretofore belonging to Mr. Vonderspeight—has become the property of Mr. Oscar—"

"Of Mr. Flemyng?"

This name drew a frown to the brow of the unhappy father.

"To Mr. Flemyng or to me; it is all the same. Consider now, madam, whether you will leave these parts and give your daughter's hand to a ruined thief."

"Ruined!" cried the widow. "Ruined! but then—"

Vonderspeight hurriedly interrupted that explanation.

"Come, my good friend," said he, earnestly. "They wish to make you the dupe of an imposture! I will explain it all immediately; but let us remain here no longer."

"Yet, sir, if indeed you were—"

"They may believe me ruined," interrupted Vonderspeight, attaching on Mery and Oscar a defiant look. "But take care! My last convulsions may be fatal to my enemies. Mr. Mery, Mr. Flemyng, all is not yet over!"

He drew the ladies from the apartment. Oscar wished to follow Adele; the Nabob forcibly detained him. The two lovers could only exchange a sign of adieu.

The father and son remained alone. Oscar, becoming somber and thoughtful, observed to Mery,

"I have obeyed you, father; but that man is master of Adele's fate. Were you not alarmed at his threats?"

"No."

"Yet he is roused to despair, and, despite his cowardice—"

"He is capable of every thing, I know—even of crime."

"Then why did you insist upon Adele's—"

"Paternal authority must be regarded sacred by us; but fear nothing. Adele is not abandoned; can we not protect her?"

"And how, father?"

"You shall see. We must now first go to the city; and God be praised that he has left a few pieces in my purse! Let us depart. Between this hour and to-morrow, we shall perhaps have but little sleep!"

A few moments later, the father and son directed their steps toward the city.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOSS AND THE GAIN.

That same evening, only a few hours after sunset, Vonderspeight, closely wrapped in a heavy cloak, was standing on the river-shore west of and facing the Red House; he held his eyes obstinately fixed on the waves, as if he wished to count their infinite undulation. Armed with a pocket-telescope, at times he would walk back and forth over the sandy beach, and at others, clamber over the lights whence he could overlook a vast horizon. Finally he became motionless, examining a fixed point on the waters. Soon the outlines of a vessel were dimly visible, much to his evident satisfaction. Quite rapidly it came on before the fresh breeze; and in a brief time came to anchor. Then a light boat was lowered, and three men pulled rapidly for the shore. Vonderspeight advanced to meet them.

"Is this you, captain?" he asked.

"Ay, ay," was the reply.

"What have you been playing for?" said Vonderspeight. "We should have been at sea. Here, stow away these traps and then follow me."

The two oarsmen, one of whom was our old acquaintance Schauss, carried the packages to the skiff.

"Is this all?" asked the captain.

"All save the ladies. Now for the house, and let us move quickly."

The profoundest silence reigned around the house, as the party approached. A light shone at the window of the Marstons; all the other windows were closed and dark. Vonderspeight entered at once.

Ordering Jerry to go and await him at the rendezvous, he ascended the stairs in the obscurity and approached the chamber of the ladies Marston. That chamber, feebly lighted, was covered with packages and valises. Still the mother and daughter were not yet dressed for the journey.

"Well! well!" said Vonderspeight, with feverish impatience. "They are awaiting you, and you are not yet ready."

"I have changed my mind; we will not leave with you," was Mrs. Marston's reply.

"You will not depart?" repeated he with astonishment.

"Ay, friend; Adele has prayed and wept so much. She is my daughter, after all; she is my only child; it is sometimes right for me to yield. Again, Adele has told me a very singular story. It has been well calculated to make a mother reflect, who is disposed to watch the interests of her daughter. Nothing will be interposed against my wishes, I trust?"

"A thousand furies!" exclaimed Vonderspeight. "No woman's twaddle will deter or thwart me, you will find to your sorrow."

Opening the window, he called the captain and Schauss, who were waiting in the garden, and the two smugglers soon answered his call.

"My boys," said Vonderspeight, "here are our passengers. They are a little reluctant to go on board; you probably know how to act under the circumstances?"

"Ay, ay," said the captain.

Vonderspeight seized the light, and ordered his men to follow with their prisoners. The females at first refused to advance; but on being intimidated with threats, at length obeyed. Mrs. Marston never ceased her cries, but the relentless men were not to be moved from their purpose, and rapidly hurried their prisoners down to the waiting boat. Vonderspeight tarried in the house a few moments, and then followed on in haste, as if fearing the sound of his own steps. He reached the place of embarkation almost as soon as the prisoners.

The latter no longer even dreamed of resistance. The night, the deserted beach, the agitated and shining waves, the boat they were going to enter, all served to unnerve them even to silence. They entered the small craft without resistance, and the entire party were very soon safely placed on the vessel's deck.

While the vessel's crew were preparing to get under way, the captain was listening to the statements of the deck-watch, and observing with uneasiness a dark mass tossed by the waves at some distance away to the south.

"That infernal revenue craft again! Just as I feared; there is no longer any doubt; it is us she is after! Come; let us try again to turn her heels. Slip the cables! Prepare to run nearer and to come about quickly."

In five minutes the little craft commenced maneuvering to gain the bay. The captain was constantly observing the suspected object, hardly visible in the darkness.

"Faith!" said he at length, "I will do every thing possible to avoid it; but if I can not succeed, Vonderspeight must

manage for himself. I am not interested in the cargo, and must not be held responsible for his enterprises."

Vonderspeight and the two ladies had retired to the cabin. The poor women, still trembling with fright, remained firmly embraced without daring to budge.

But, the captain soon called Vonderspeight, and a rapid colloquy took place near the cabin door.

"This is a vexatious mishap!" at length said the old clerk with a disturbed accent. "If there be really no means of avoiding them, ascertain, at least, what they wish. They must be laboring under a mistake, for no one could have guessed my projects. Well! captain, you must reply; you know what is expedient."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The captain moved away. Vonderspeight re-entered the cabin and closed the door behind him; then, snapping the trigger of a pistol, he said, with a moved voice,

"Ladies, this is no time to be gallant. If, then, during the next ten minutes you utter an exclamation of any kind, I will shoot you as I would any man. I have warned you; so be wise!"

A large yacht, provided with oars as well as sails, was advancing toward the vessel.

"Sail ahoy! Who are you—where bound?"

The smuggler, assured that the hail was by an officer of the port, responded,

"A trader from above; bound down with a load of truck!"

The officer seemed disposed to let the "coaster" continue his way quietly; but, two other persons evidently entertained other views, for the noise of discussion arose from the revenue cutter's deck while the smuggler continued peacefully his way. She would perhaps have escaped, but that suddenly an immense blaze, rising on the shore, lit up the waters and the two vessels stood out in clear relief.

"The Red House is on fire!" cried a voice from the cutter's deck. "It is Vonderspeight's sign of flight. He is on board that craft, for it is just from his landing."

"To your oars! My friends, to your oars!" cried a voice, in a tone of command. "We must find out what is in the wind."

The oars of the gig in tow fell into the water, manned by a half-score of sturdy seamen.

"Gentlemen!" cried the revenue officer, "this is illegal; we have no right to mount thus, at least—"

"Sir," was the reply, "there is certainly on this vessel a man whom I have denounced as an incendiary. If I am mistaken, I will be responsible for my blunder. Come! old comrades of the *Syren*, a good pull for Rattlepate, and be ready to board."

The gig flew over the waters, and ere two minutes were past the sailors had mounted the smuggler's deck; but, despite their

agility, some one had preceded the hardy seamen. It was Oscar.

This sudden aggression rendered all resistance impossible on the part of the smuggler. The two crews soon became so confounded in the darkness, that it would have been difficult to recognize the men of the one from the other. In the midst of the tumult, Oscar and Mery were running about the deck, in a high state of excitement.

"Where is that infamous scoundrel, Vonderspeight?" exclaimed Mery. "Where is that deeply-dyed villain? Knave, will you speak?"

His redoubtable fist struck the chest of the nearest smuggler.

"Holy mother! Do not kill me! Spare me, Mr. Nabob! Another such blow, and you will have killed the best Christain in the world!" It was Schauss!

"What! This is you, my old comrade?" said Mery, with good humor. "Take care, my friend, or you will not have a bone left, I warn you!"

At this moment, the cabin door opened, and a man holding a pistol in each hand appeared on deck. Oscar was the first to perceive him.

"Vonderspeight!" he cried, with a loud voice.

And he darted upon him. But, in the same instant, a piercing voice called him, and Adele and her mother appeared in the shade. Oscar, forgetting his mortal enemy, ran toward the two women, and received Adele almost swooning in his arms; Mrs. Marston herself, trembling with joy, welcomed him as a liberator, and clung to his garments.

Mery, however, at the other end of the vessel, had heard the exclamation of Oscar.

"Vonderspeight!" repeated he, with a railing tone; "where is he? Let no one touch him before me. I owe him a double ration, and ask to be served before others."

He cleared a passage through the sailors; but a man of tall stature suddenly stood before him.

"One moment, Mr. Nabob," said the captain. "I also owe you something!"

He raised his hand armed with a dagger; Mery took a step backward and held himself on guard.

"Ah! This is your grace, caballero?" said he, calmly. "Very good! But, I have no time for playing *a la Navajo*. Have the kindness to wait only fifteen minutes, and I will be at your service."

"A thousand furies! I do not wish to wait!"

"Come on, then, my friend: you are pressing as the wind. Well! I am also pressed to get hold of Vonderspeight. Where is he?"

"He is here," said a husky voice, a few steps away. "You have the advantage to-day; but you shall not long enjoy it."

A pistol-shot followed, and a man fell, uttering a feeble groan.

"I am avenged," cried Vonderspeight. "To the infernal regions with the rest!"

He darted to the vessel's side, and at once threw himself into the waves.

"A man overboard! Quick with the skiff—the gig," cried both crews, as they sprung for their small-boats.

But Oscar did not pause to think of Vonderspeight.

"He has killed him," cried he, with despair, running toward the fallen man. "He has killed my unhappy—"

"Who?" said Mery, laughingly, showing himself suddenly. "It is not I, I hope? The old knave was not skilled with the pistol, I imagine, for he lodged his bullet behind my head in the captain's forehead."

Adele and Oscar, seated in the stern of the smuggler, delivered themselves up to the happiness they experienced in finding themselves again together. At a short distance, Mrs. Marston was conversing with Mery; the latter, half reclining on a roll of cordage, was philosophically looking at the flames that devoured the old Red Mansion on the shore. The good lady appeared surprised at his indifference.

"That will be a great loss, Mr. Mery," said she. "The Red House was a fine old dwelling, and—"

"What are you talking about? That old brick pile? Pshaw! I should myself have torn it down but for my respect for the souvenirs of my family. We will build it over, and it shall be gilded like the pagoda of Irrawaddy!"

"Really, Mr. Mery," said Mrs. Marston, with her most gracious smile, "you are very rich, then?"

"We shall certainly live free from want, Mother Marston—ourselves and our children!"

"Our children!" repeated the lady, looking very much puzzled.

"What, madam!" exclaimed Oscar, impetuously. "Did you not know that Mr. Mery is my father?"

Mery smiled; the lovers joined hands, and the vessel entered port.

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